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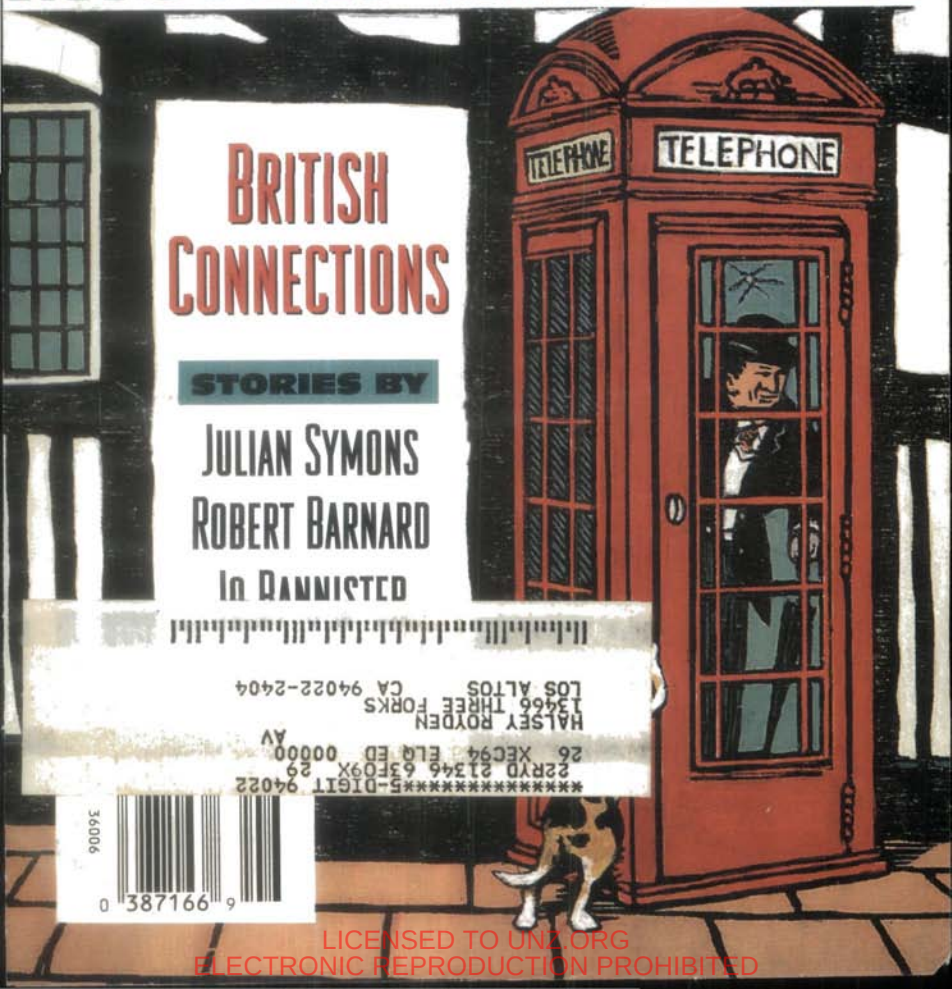

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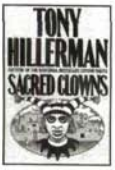

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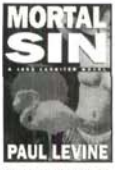

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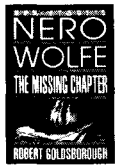

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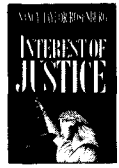

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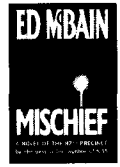

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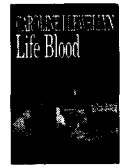

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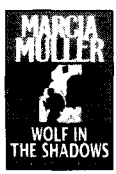

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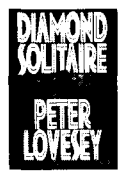

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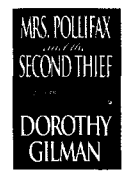

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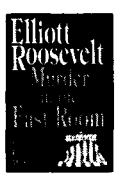

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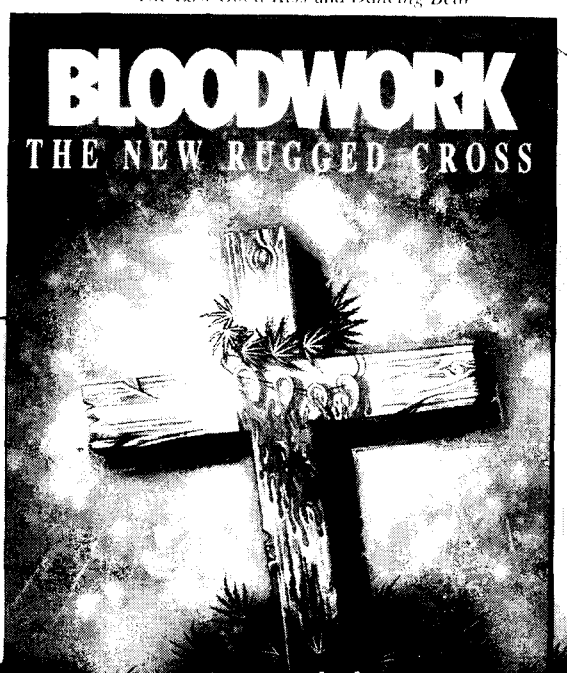

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a ***NEW*** **short story by**

JULIAN SYMONS

Julian Symons, alert as always to the ways in which art influences culture, manages to take a wry look at a medium that competes with our own in this psychologically penetrating story of a book dealer and his offspring in the TV business . . .

THE MAN WHO HATED TELEVISION

by JULIAN SYMONS

You say it may help if I tell the story of my father's tragedy as I saw it, and I will try to do that. The origin of it was that my father, Jacob Pryde, hated television.

There was a reason for this. His own father was an insurance salesman who cheated his employers by claiming commission on nonexistent sales which he justified by forged orders and invoices. When this could not be covered up any longer, he took his wife out in their car, stopped in a quiet country road, and shot first her and then himself.

My father was small, I believe five years old. He was taken away from home by an aunt and told his parents had gone on holiday. He learned of their deaths because he was watching the TV news when an item was shown with pictures of the car and their bodies. I'm told that for some time after that he screamed whenever the television was switched on. So it is not surprising that he refused to have a set in our home.

Television was not the only thing father hated. I think he also hated his wife Susan, and perhaps he hated the people to whom he sold the rare books in which he dealt, books he sometimes said he

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would sooner have kept on his own shelves in the extension added to our little house in Wandsworth, which is a district in southwest London. The extension was called the library, but really it was just a brick addition to the house, joined to it by a covered passageway.

So did my father hate everybody? Not quite. He loved one person, his daughter Elvira. Me.

These were the characters in the tragedy, one that seems to me in retrospect inevitable. There was also Doctor Finale, but of course he did not exist. Let me tell the story.

There was a time—the pictures in my mind flicker uncertainly like those in an old film—when father was a lover, not a hater. I remember, or *think* I remember, for it is hard to be sure about such scenes from early years, a time when father was happy, and loving not only to me but also to Susan. I see him bending over my cot, lifting me out, his moustache tickling my neck so that I scream with laughter, and he laughs too. I see him holding my mother, they are performing a kind of dance across the room, then they collapse onto a bed. I am standing up in my cot watching, she shrieks something, he cries out, and I cry out too because I think he is hurting her. Later they hold me, pass me from one to the other, make cooing encouraging sounds.

There are other pictures, similarly fuzzy, particularly of Susan in the kitchen. She loved the kitchen, and was a great cook. I see her busy with a fruitcake, making pancakes on Shrove Tuesday and throwing them up and catching them in the pan, putting a joint of beef in the oven. She is always cheerful, often laughing. Sometimes she sang, out of tune, a snatch of a popular song. Father was in the extension or library, cataloguing his old dark books, cleaning them, perhaps even reading them. She would send me in to tell him when a meal was ready.

I remember the day when her laughter stopped. I was very young, four or five, but I remember it.

She was cooking something, I don't know what, something in a pan with hot fat. I was playing beside the kitchen table near her, perhaps putting a doll to bed, I can't remember. She was singing. Then suddenly her song changed to a scream. I saw there were flames in the pan, bright yellow, and some fat had splashed onto her hand. My father ran in from the extension. His first thought was for me, that I might be splashed by the burning fat. He picked me up, and as he did so he or I must have knocked against the pan.

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The fat in it went straight into my mother's face. Then there were screams and screams.

When she came out of hospital after the skin grafts, one side of her face was stiff and unreal as if it was made of wood or hard wax, and the left side of her mouth was fixed in what looked like a sneering grin. When I first saw her I cried, ran away and hid.

From that time our life changed. My father could not bear ugly things. Susan was ugly now, and I think he blamed her for it. He spoke to her as little as possible, and would sometimes ask if she couldn't look at him without that grin on her face. She had changed too. She was very silent now, never sang, looked after the house as before, and cooked, but took no pleasure in it. She rarely left the house, never with him. I don't think he offered to take her.

His attention now was focused almost exclusively on me. We spent hours together in the library where he told me about the books, which were valuable and why, showed me how to distinguish between typefaces and tell which was appropriate for a particular kind of book or size of page, the way in which he described books when he sent out lists to attract the interest of possible clients.

The whole of his business was carried on through these lists or catalogues, which he prepared with immense care. When he received an order he would be both pleased and upset, upset because he hated to part with any of the books. Orders would be packed first in tissue paper, then plastic wrapping, cardboard, and finally thick brown paper. He tried vainly to teach me what he called the art of packing. In part this was because my fingers seemed all thumbs when I tried to put the wrapping round, but also I felt that to take such care about packing a book was ridiculous. Not until I was thirteen or fourteen did I realise that all those evenings and weekends spent in the library were preparation for the time when he expected me to carry on the business. One day he showed me a sheet of the writing paper headed *Jacob Pryde, Fine Books,* and said: "The time will come when this will be *Jacob and Elvira Pryde,* and then just *Elvira.*"

I knew then that this would not be so. I had little interest in books, none in bookselling. Those hours spent in the library or extension were time wasted for me, hours of boredom. Why did I not say so? Because I both admired and feared my father. He was a handsome man, rather above the ordinary height, slim, hair and moustache iron grey, face lean, nose aquiline, expression generally stern.

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He had only two recreations in life apart from his books. One was his car, an old Mercedes which he cared for as if it were a child, washing, leathering, and polishing it weekly. The other was a local club for those who, like him, had been in the Territorial army. He had somehow managed to retain the revolver used by his own father, and he used it to practice in the club's little shooting gallery. He took me to the club once, but I did not care for the beer-drinking, back-slapping atmosphere, and perhaps he realised this. Certainly he never suggested I should pay another visit.

And my mother, she who had laughed and sung? She was like a lamed bird, trying always to hide the damaged part of her face with its unintended sneer. Are you thinking I should have pitied her, loved her? No doubt I ought to have done, but in truth her appearance repelled me and I took no pains to conceal the fact. Of course she noticed my behaviour, and it must have pained her.

This may sound like a miserable household, yet when young one becomes accustomed to any way of life. What I missed most was the lack of a television set. At school all the girls talked about the programmes, the sexy women and the hunky men ("hunky" was a great word at the time among my friends—"He's really hunky" meant more than sexy, rather like "macho" but intelligent and understanding as well). I hadn't seen the hunky men on TV, couldn't talk about them. I felt deprived, and illogically blamed my mother, and not my father.

At fourteen I began smoking pot and using amphetamines. I also had my first sexual coupling, with a boy who acted with me in the school play. These were experiments. I found them pleasant and continued experimenting. The boys were callow, not hunky, the drugs soothing rather than exciting. I know psychiatrists attribute what they call the early resort to sex and drugs to the nature of my home life. Personally I put it down to being deprived of TV. If I'd seen hunky men on the screen I don't think I'd have started experimenting with a schoolboy.

One day, under the soothing influence of speed (I know it's supposed to excite, but can only say I *felt* perfectly calm), I told Jacob my name would never be on the writing paper. For a moment he seemed not to have heard, then he asked what I meant. He was in the midst of a tedious exposition about the qualities of some rare editions he had recently bought. I picked up the book—though it was not really a book but a pamphlet, something to do with Swinburne or Rossetti or one of that lot—and said I wasn't interested, everything

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to do with his business bored me. As I spoke the pamphlet drifted away and sank slowly to the floor, yet some of it remained in my hand. I had torn it in two, an act performed quite unconsciously and at the time causing me no alarm. I repeat that speed *felt* soothing.

Jacob—it was at this moment he changed in my perception from *Father* to *Jacob*—at first looked unbelievingly from what remained in my hand to the papers on the floor. Then I saw his hand raised, heard the sound as it struck my cheek (the sound, though, faint and fading like an echo). The paper I held was removed from my grasp, and then he was on the floor picking up the rest of the pamphlet, saying something I failed to hear or understand. But I could not mistake the look in his dark eyes as we stood close together, the pages still in his trembling hand. It was a look of hatred.

I ran out of the library, my feet seeming to bounce lightly on the ground, and spent the rest of the evening in my room. It had been my custom to kiss Jacob's cheek, and that of my mother—the good side of course—when I came down to breakfast, but on the next morning my lips brushed only her cheek. Then I sat down. Jacob stared at me. I stared back. Then he spoke, not to me nor to Susan, simply a ruler laying down the law in his kingdom.

"Elvira has been stupidly disobedient. She has destroyed a valuable first edition. She says also that she does not wish to do the work for which I have trained her, as my assistant and eventual partner. She must be taught obedience. Elvira will receive no allowance for a month, nor leave this house in the evening without my permission. Her evenings will be spent with me in the library, learning more about her future occupation."

But, you will say, how could anybody talk like that? This was the twentieth century, the place London and not some rural area where time had stood still. I was fifteen years old. I can only say that strange things happen in the heart of great cities, and that Jacob Pryde was an unusual, an extraordinary man. The fixity of his dark gaze was compelling, it excluded any possibility of doubt that he would be obeyed. He drove me to school that day in the Mercedes, sitting bolt upright, immovable as a statue. When we arrived he said he would be waiting for me in the afternoon. I saw the future stretching before me, as it seemed endlessly, long days in classrooms and longer evenings in the library forced to learn more about the world of book dealing I had come to detest. That evening my mother, the wounded bird, said in a moment when we were alone that she was sorry, there was nothing she could do. I knew this was true.

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Jacob had bent her to his will, as he now meant to bend me.

Yet this *was* the twentieth century, I *was* fifteen years old and not literally a prisoner. There were people I knew through the drugs circuit, and through the school play I had met one or two students at RADA. On the third night spent under Jacob's Law, I took money from my mother's purse, left a note in my bedroom saying I was not coming back but would be in touch, and shinned down a drainpipe outside my bedroom window. I spent that night on the sofa of a girl at RADA.

I don't want to describe the next six years in detail. I slept around (contracting neither AIDS nor any venereal disease), worked in shops, got hooked on drugs, and then unhooked myself when I realised what they were doing to me—and I made a career in TV. I had hated those old smelly books Jacob caressed with such pleasure, and was bored by the theatre, yet I wanted some sort of career connected with the arts, modern arts, and what is more modern than TV? It's here today and forgotten next week, and I like that too. I hate the sort of stuff Jacob loved, that lingers on and on, stuff people like simply because it's old.

Anyway, I made a career on the box, first with the help of the RADA student, who introduced me to her agent. I'm supposed to have a wistful little-girl-lost look, and I played mostly what you might call victim parts in sitcoms and thrillers, never a lead player. I suppose I was typecast, but typecasting can have its advantages. If you're lucky it can keep you in steady work. And I was lucky. At twenty-one I had my own little flat, a bit of money in the bank, no steady boyfriend.

I used my own name, Elvira Pryde, why not? I talked quite often to Susan on the phone, but Jacob would never speak. Soon after I started appearing on the box I paid for a set and had it sent to her. Of course I knew Jacob would never buy her one, but I couldn't have imagined his reaction. When I rang to ask if she had enjoyed seeing me, she told me Jacob had been angry when he saw the set, and had been beside himself when he heard it came from me. He made her look while he smashed it up with a hammer, then threw it away. Perhaps I should have realised then that he was crazy.

Susan told me about this without apparent emotion. The accident had changed not only her face but also her voice, making it dry and thin. I asked why she didn't leave Jacob, come and live with me. She said she was his wife, what would he do without her? I was going to say what I thought of that when she added: "He's a good

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man, you know. He only wanted the best for you."

"The *best.*" I couldn't believe what I heard.

"He loves you. You know that."

"He's mad. He must be, to hate television the way he does."

"He wants you to come back. He would make you a partner at once. And I would be pleased."

She said it in that same dry voice. Suppose she had pleaded with me, would it have made a difference? I don't suppose so.

Then I got the job as Doctor Finale's assistant. That was a real boost for me, regular work in a thirteen-part series, and a bigger part than anything I'd had. After the tragedy, of course the show came off the air. It's never mentioned now, and I don't suppose anything like it will be done again. So I'd better describe it briefly.

It was called a horror soap, and that's about right. Doctor Finale, as his name suggests, was a kind of last resort. One man came to him because he was dying of AIDS and believed his heir had deliberately arranged his infection, a woman wanted revenge on the man who'd killed her young daughter in a car accident and been acquitted on trial, a man whose family had been wiped out by a terrorist bomb wanted Doctor Finale's help in turning himself into a living bomb that would blow up the terrorist state's embassy.

Mostly these were revenge stories, always they were violent. Doctor Finale, whose degree was in psychology and not medicine, had no regard for the law and was absolutely ruthless. Once he discovered a client had been trying to trick him, and arranged a trap that left him financially ruined and physically damaged. Doctor Finale respected only money and power. He was an emotional sadist who treated everybody, clients, opponents, and his own assistants, with contempt. Those who did not hate him worshipped him, and I was one of the worshippers. He was played by Lester Morton, a handsome actor in his forties made up to look suitably sinister. I was his secretary Jennifer, a prissy worshipper who was the subject of constant sneers at her accent, love life, and lack of clothes sense.

Lester was apologetic. "I've never played such an A-one bastard," he said. "I don't know why you stay with him."

He laughed, and I did too. "It's your psychic magnetism, Doctor. That and the viewing figures." Lester was undeniably an attractive man, everybody said so. And we all knew the show was a success. There had been a short series before I came into it, starting as a cult oddity admired by a few critics. Then it had shot up in the ratings, gaining more viewers every week. One producer, asked to

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explain its success, said: "Sadism and violence, how can it fail?" It's always nice to be associated with success, although something about my scenes with Lester made me faintly uneasy.

One day when I rang Susan her voice seemed duller and drier than usual. I asked her if something was wrong.

"This play you are in—"

"Not really a play, it's a series. About someone called Doctor Finale, and people who come to him with problems."

"This Doctor Finale, what is he like?"

"He's a monster."

"But what does he look like?" Before I could reply, she went on: "Does he look like your father?"

The question stunned me. Lester was balding a little and wore a grey wig, he was made up round the eyes and had a way of opening them wide and then half-closing them that was frightening, his complexion was dark and his nose aquiline—was it a likeness to Jacob that had made me feel uneasy when playing scenes with him? My mother went on to say that at one of the book sales Jacob attended, somebody had congratulated him on my success as a TV actress. That would have been sufficiently uncongenial to him, but the man went on to say the principal actor had been made up to look exactly like Jacob. He added that other dealers had noticed it and it had caused much amusement.

Susan was upset. She said Jacob thought I had arranged deliberately that the actor should look like him, that I was sneering at him by making an odious character recognisable as Jacob. I tried to make her understand how absurd it was to suppose an unimportant actress like me could have had any part in the casting.

"This actor who is playing Doctor Finale, how well do you know him?" I did not reply. How well I knew Lester was not her business. "Does he look like your father?"

I said I could see no resemblance, but when I put down the telephone I wondered. When I left home I had taken with me a photograph of Jacob, and now I compared it with one of Lester as Doctor Finale. At times it seemed to me there was no likeness, at others the two faces seemed to blend into each other and become one. I found Jennifer's scenes with Doctor Finale disturbing, especially those when the doctor touched her and, on one occasion when she had made a mistake, hit her so that she fell and lay whimpering in a corner of the room. The director was pleased with the scene but Lester was concerned, said he hoped he hadn't hurt me. I replied

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that he couldn't possibly have hurt *me,* he would have hurt Jennifer, and since she had recovered enough to be in a car chasing a pair of graverobbers a few minutes later, she had not been hurt. Lester laughed, but I'm not sure he understood what I meant, which was that Jennifer is one person, I am another.

When I rang Susan again three or four days later, she surprised me by saying Jacob had hired a television and a video recorder. He had taped the last two Doctor Finale programmes, including the one in which Jennifer was knocked across the room, and played them again and again. She said he was beside himself, at one moment raging against my betrayal of him by putting him on the screen, the next saying he must protect me against the way I was being treated. She wanted me to come home and talk to him. I asked how she thought that would help. I was very calm.

"He believes this Doctor Finale is made up to look like him, and it's your doing." I repeated that this was ridiculous. "The men at the club all think it's a great joke, they've started calling him Doctor Finale. If you could explain to him—"

"There's nothing to explain." But there was something I wanted to know. "You saw the programmes, did you think she was good, Jennifer? Did she convince you?"

"Good? Oh yes, I suppose so." She spoke in that strangled voice, as if she didn't mean it. "I wish you would talk to him. He's not himself. He hates the television, but he sits in front of it playing those scenes with you in them, sometimes shouting at you and at the man. I'm afraid of what he'll do."

I didn't take her seriously. I should have done. I said I had no intention of coming home or talking to Jacob. I repeated what I had said before, she should leave Jacob and come and live with me. That might have been awkward, because Lester had moved in with me, but I suppose I really knew she would never leave Jacob.

So I come to the last scene of the tragedy.

The episode in production was based on what was said to be an actual plot by the CIA to assassinate Castro by poisoning the wet suit he used. The intended victim here was a Middle East dictator who had already foiled several assassination attempts, the most recent being shown in a violent opening scene where two agents were caught trying to fix limpet bombs to the dictator's yacht and then tortured to death. Doctor Finale, approached by the government, produces the plan for the poisoned wet suit, then gains the dictator's confidence by revealing the plan to him. The doctor plans

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with the dictator to blow up the House of Commons and install a friendly prime minister. The dictator fancies Jennifer, and attempts to rape her. Doctor Finale, who has appeared to arrange the rape, breaks in before the dictator has his wicked way, shoots him with a poisoned dart from a cigarette lighter, and escapes with Jennifer in a submarine lurking off the coast, mission accomplished.

Tosh, with plenty of action, lots of nastiness, scenes with the dictator's other women, etcetera.

We were shooting a scene between the doctor and Jennifer, in which he tells her she must go to the dictator's bedroom and do whatever he asks. Jennifer at first refuses but finally agrees, compelled by the mesmeric power of Doctor Finale's malevolent gaze. At one moment she says he wouldn't care if she was given to the guards to be raped and brutalised. She waits for him to contradict her. "Would you care? Would you?" she asks, and he replies calmly: "Not in the least."

It was a difficult scene to do—not to mention the over-the-top dialogue—and Joe Frawley, the director, was on his fourth take when there was a lot of noise from the dark area at the back of the set. It sounded as if props were being knocked over, then there were voices. After that, silence. And then Jacob Pryde came out of the darkness onto the studio floor.

Joe said: "Who the hell are you?" Then he was silent as Jacob moved towards Lester. The revolver, that fatal revolver, was in his hand. Jacob said: "You are Doctor Finale. You have corrupted my daughter."

Lester muttered something about it being just a play, shrank away. Seeing the two together, I recognised the likeness discovered by Jacob's friends. It was not just that they were physically of a size. The shape of the lean head, the bell-like ring of the voice and its contemptuous tone, the look that pierced the personality of the person it was aimed at and punctured self-confidence and self-belief—that look to which I had been exposed daily during my most susceptible years—those were the similarities I recognised. There was this difference, that Lester was an actor assuming such qualities, while in Jacob they were real.

I knew what I had to do. "Jacob," I said. "Father."

He turned. That gaze of fire and ice was bent on me. "I have come to take you home," he said, and I replied that I would come home. I said he should give me the revolver. He came very close to me, held out the blue shining thing, and I took it. His arms were spread wide,

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wide as those of a fallen angel, as I moved into his embrace. But then, as he looked over my shoulder, he must have seen Lester again. He shouted something incoherent about corrupting and saving me and struggled to get the revolver. I knew why he wanted it, to kill Lester—I suppose that would have been in a way to kill himself—and I did my best to keep hold of it when I felt his hand on mine. The rest of them seemed to stay still, like figures in a tableau, as Jacob and I struggled. I heard a crack, another crack. I could not have said where it came from. Then Jacob sighed, and said something again about our going home together. And that was all. It seemed somehow right that he should have died in my arms—or was it in Jennifer's arms? Now that I think about it afterwards, I believe he really was Doctor Finale.

"Interesting, but I'm afraid not very satisfactory," Dr. Margetson said. Her eyes behind the large square glasses were gentle as a gazelle's. "The idea of suggesting to patients that they should write about the experiences in the outer world that have brought them here is to see how near they get to facing what actually happened."

"Does that really matter?" the visitor asked.

On Dr. Margetson's desk there was a telephone, a diary pad, a paperweight in the shape of a lion's head, and a jar of red and yellow roses. She paused for a moment as if giving the visitor's novel idea consideration before she answered. "Oh yes. Yes, I think it matters if they are unable to accept reality." Her voice was delicate, light, comforting, although the words were not. "Elvira is happy here at Fernley Park. She has made friends, I don't think she really wants to leave. It may even be possible to use her acting abilities in the Christmas play."

"Nobody can like being shut up."

"We try to make patients feel they are not shut up but cared for. But in any case—you've read this?" She indicated the exercise book written in a round, almost childish hand. "Or rather, you've read a typed copy of it. What did you think?"

"It's very vivid. And quite clear, quite coherent."

"But not accurate."

"Oh yes, I thought so. Leaving home, getting out of the window—"

"But not about the reason for leaving. Elvira didn't leave because her father smacked her face. Nor because she was bored with what she learned about the book trade. In our conversations, long friendly conversations in which Elvira spoke freely, with no constraint or

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inducement, she told me of the many occasions when her father sexually abused her in the extension or library, whichever you call it. And Elvira consented; when she was a girl she was in love with her father. He was a handsome man, and she liked handsome men. Then she fully realised what she was doing and felt revulsion from it—"

"There is no proof, no proof anything happened at all. It's only what she says now. She said nothing at the time."

Softly Dr Margetson said: "And you never asked questions?"

"Why should I have done?" Susan Pryde's hands were clasped tightly. "If there had been any proof—"

"Positive proof is often lacking in such matters. But we know, you and I, that Elvira was capable of deceit. And that she could be vicious. What she says here about your own tragedy is not the truth."

Susan Pryde had been sitting, as she always tried to do, with the good side of her face turned towards Dr. Margetson, but now she turned to show the waxen half of her features with their curious smiling sneer. "It was an accident. I have always said so."

The doctor's voice was dulcet. "I don't mean to criticise you in any way. But Elvira is not telling the truth. She says she was four or five years old, and perhaps playing with a doll. In fact she was eight, and perhaps already being molested."

"It was a long time ago. I've tried to put it all out of my mind."

"Elvira says you tried to stop her going into the library one day, perhaps because you suspected what happened there. There was an argument, and she caught hold of the pan of fat and threw it in your face."

"Why should you believe her? It's her word against mine."

"I believe what she tells me, that she felt the need to atone for what she had done. That was partly why she telephoned so often. For that, and to have news of her father. He had never got over her departure, longed for her to come back. Isn't that so?"

"Perhaps."

Miriam Margetson's gaze was friendly through the square lenses. "But he wanted the girl he had known, not the woman who appeared on a television screen. So he destroyed the television." She waited for a comment, but none came. "He wanted to resume their relationship, something Elvira contemplated with horror at the same time that she desired it."

"All this is simply something you are inventing."

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"Did you notice her hints about Lester? First that she knew him well, then the casual remark that he had moved in with her. He was a replacement for the father she loved and feared."

"She happened to mention him, that's all. You make too much of everything."

Dr. Margetson shook her head. "Such remarks are never accidental, they have meaning. And so does what she says about the final scene, blending fact with invention. It's true your husband went to the studio with the idea that he could persuade or force Elvira to give up her work as an actress and return to him. And she agreed, so why should he want to fire the revolver?"

"To hurt the actor, Lester Morton, Doctor Finale."

"Why should he do that when he thought Elvira had agreed to go with him? Is it really likely that the shots that killed him were fired by accident? Elvira says that when his arms closed on her she tried to keep hold of the revolver. And she did keep hold, her prints were on it."

"*It was the pressure of his hand that fired the shots.*" Now Susan looked steadily, full face, at the doctor. "I want my daughter home again. To live with me. Perhaps eventually to resume her career."

"I have to remind you that it was to avoid the trauma of appearing in court with all it would have entailed that Elvira became a voluntary patient here at Fernley Park."

"Until she might be ready for release. That was three years ago."

"She is not ready yet."

"Let me judge for myself. It's over a year since I have seen her. I want to see my daughter."

"As you wish." The doctor picked up the telephone, murmured words. Her gentle eyes looked at Susan sympathetically.

Any doubt Susan Pryde felt about her daughter's health was dispelled by the sight of her. She wore a bright print dress, her bare arms were brown, she was smiling. A uniformed nurse stood beside the door. Elvira's voice was clear and high as she said, "Miriam, I didn't know I was going to see you this afternoon." She stopped. "Who's this?"

She shrank back as Susan came towards her and said: "It's me. Your mother."

"No." Elvira shook her head. "You're ugly. My mother isn't ugly. Ask my father, he knows my mother isn't ugly."

Dr. Margetson said: "Elvira, be quiet and listen. Your mother wants—"

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Elvira shrieked, "No," again, picked up the paperweight, and threw it at Susan. There was a tinkle of broken glass as it hit a picture on the wall. Elvira moaned with distress, launched herself at Dr. Margetson. They grappled for a moment, then the nurse pinned Elvira's arms behind her back and took her away.

The doctor retrieved her glasses, which had been knocked off. "You see."

"Is she often like that?"

"She lives in the present, which is Fernley Park, some other patients, me. She has eliminated the past. But if she is to leave here she must come to terms with it, remember it as it was." She tapped the exercise book. "This was a trial run. It is disappointing, but we shall try again, perhaps in another form. One day she will be ready to come out. But not yet."

"She seems to like you."

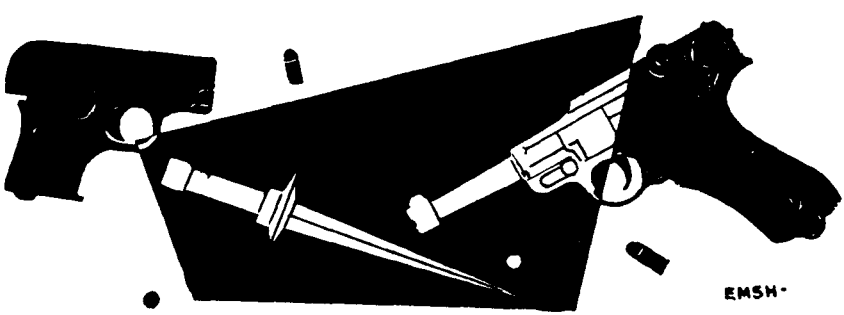
"Affections are often transferred. One must be careful not to reject them. But also not to accept. If you understand me." The doctor permitted herself a small smile.

"You believe she did this to my face, killed her father. Those things are not true. I *know* it, I tell you." She turned the waxen side of her face to the doctor, the lip curled in its sneer.

"You are her mother. I respect your feelings."

Susan Pryde's voice rose. "You have institutionalised her, turned her into a zombie. You are the guilty one."

"Perhaps it helps you to think so. But I am glad you've seen Elvira." She picked up the lion's head paperweight, replaced it on the desk. "And whatever you think, no harm has been done. Except, of course, for a little broken glass."



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a *NEW* Baytown story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

Among the several unique qualities of Bill Bankier's fiction is the manner in which he treats violence, making the lunatic act appear natural, describing it, however bizarre, without a touch of luridness. In so doing he manages to create a powerful impression of a world askew . . .

LONG TIME NO MURDER

by WILLIAM BANKIER

"Can I borrow your car for the day, Freddie?" Nathan Tipaldi wandered aimlessly into Fred Howser's kitchen. He was doing what he did best these days, playing the part of the discouraged writer.

Howser said, "The keys are on my dresser." He went back to making french toast. Both men were overweight. Howser was tall and beefy, his head buried in curly black hair and beard. Tipaldi was no taller than a schoolboy, mostly bald and shiny as a dime.

"Promise me one thing," Fred went on.

"What?"

"That you'll stop off first at Connie's house. Tell her you're okay. The poor woman worries about you."

When they separated over a year ago, Nathan gave Connie Tremayne the house and the royalties from his latest book. The book was not doing well. "You tell her, Fred," he said. "She was your friend before she was my wife."

Tipaldi left the room and came back with the car keys. "Besides," he said, "the fewer people I see, the better. I'm in no mood."

It was fair warning. Nathan Tipaldi had made up his mind to commit murder before the sun went down on this Indian summer day.

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After his friend drove away, Howser telephoned Connie Tremayne. "He's gone for the day."

"He's not coming here?"

"He said not. He took my car. Trying to find a way around his writer's block." After a discreet pause, Howser said, "Want to come over?"

"It could be a trap. He may be planning to drive back early and discover us."

"Nathan has known about you and me from the beginning."

"That doesn't mean we're not on his list. He is such a devious little plotter."

Tipaldi chose the highway and drove east. Lake Ontario was on his right, the provincial towns on his left. Howser's car was a '78 Cadillac in mint condition. It rolled majestically along the road, like a hearse. Nathan drove past Oshawa, then past Cobourg. Soon he would take a side road north into farm country.

He was imitating what Mike Munro had done all those years ago out in Flintheart, Alberta. Munro was now serving a life term without possibility of parole. His story, and that of his victims, the Elgar family, had inspired Tipaldi to write his bestseller *Sheer Terror*. For two months, he lived in the prairie town, learning all there was to know about the Elgars. He went on to visit the killer time and again in his cell. Some said Mike Munro was a more sympathetic character, after the book was done, than the poor murdered farm family. But all agreed, it was a masterpiece.

The writer needed another one. His floundering career was about to go belly up. The idea occurred to Tipaldi one evening as he was lying on the sofa with half a liter of red wine sloshing about inside him.

It had been a long time since Canada had experienced a properly dramatic set of murders. He could fix that. He would do what Mike Munro had done. He would drive aimlessly through the countryside, choose a remote location at random, approach some unsuspecting inhabitants, and kill them.

The senseless crime would dominate the headlines. At the proper time, he would travel to the scene and write a true-crime novel. It would become a bestseller. Fred Howser might produce a television docudrama based on the book. He had done that with *Stark Terror*. Tipaldi's fame would be restored. The CBC might even forgive his

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drunken talk-show appearance and invite him back on the air.

Passing through a town, Tipaldi stopped near a department store. First, he bought a black nylon jumpsuit. At his request, the clerk cut off the tags. Then he went to the hardware department and bought a jerrycan, the kind with a spout, often used to transport gasoline. Now he drove to a service station with his purchases beside him on the front seat. Here, he filled the can with unleaded at a self-service pump and paid cash to the attendant in his booth. He stowed the can in the trunk and drove on.

What mischief would Connie and Fred be up to by this time? Real people were so damn difficult. Not like the ones he invented, who did exactly what he wanted them to. And if they crossed him, he could end them. But actual folks had to be placated at the most inconvenient times.

The flirtation with Connie had been fun. As Fred's secretary, she was around all the time whenever Nathan visited the CBC offices. Marriage provided a payoff, at first. The title "husband" permitted him to swagger. But the commitment was beyond him. How did people stay together until death parted them? Come to that, he could never kill Connie. The police always investigated the spouse first.

Tipaldi became hungry. He stopped at a roadside diner. After lunch, it was time to hit the back country. A couple of miles past Trenton, the writer swung a left onto a poorly paved road. Soon he was *cruising between fields marred by outcroppings of glacial rock*. In the distance, he saw barns made of weathered wood. The big car rocked gently as its suspension absorbed pothole after pothole.

Another random turn, this time to the right. It was almost four o'clock in the afternoon; he had been driving since eleven. The autumn sky was losing its light. He was on a dirt road. A line of five tall poplars ahead drew his attention to a squat frame house.

Closer by, a man in overalls was bending to a rail displaced from a snake fence. He was lifting it into place. The effort tired him. Tipaldi stopped the car and watched the man sit on a boulder, take off his straw hat, and swab his forehead with a kerchief.

He turned the key and the engine died. The man was on his feet again, his back to the road. Another timber needed lifting. Tipaldi got out of the car, leaving the door ajar. He took up the black nylon jumpsuit, unfolded it, and drew it on, zipping it from waist to collar. Then he unlocked the trunk and lifted the lid.

A tire iron was resting on a folded tarp, beside the brand-new jerrycan. Tipaldi closed the trunk and walked into the field. The

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rusty iron was inconspicuous, carried beside the leg of the black suit.

The farmer was not aware of the stranger's approach. By the time he turned, Tipaldi was within arm's reach. The iron swung, catching the man on the crown of his head. He dropped to his knees, then fell sideways. Tipaldi knelt beside him to deliver a series of blows. He chose his spots carefully, touching up the head like an artist completing a masterpiece.

The jumpsuit was spattered with blood. But it was not yet time to take it off. Tipaldi walked across furrows to a dirt lane leading to the farmhouse. He was carrying the tire iron, a crimson weapon now.

The sound of his boots on the porch steps brought a middle-aged woman to the screen door. She was wiping her hands on a polka-dot apron. The door was not locked. When the stranger opened it and walked into the house, so peaceful was this rural domain, the woman only raised her eyebrows out of curiosity.

She was smiling when the iron bar struck the side of her head.

Minutes later, Nathan Tipaldi reappeared on the porch carrying her body in his arms. He placed her where she sat so often of an evening, on a wicker rocking chair facing the sunset. Then he left the cottage and walked back to where the dead farmer lay.

Hoisting the body across his shoulders in a fireman's lift, the murderer carried his first victim back to the house and placed him in a chair beside his wife. Both bodies rocked gently as he left the porch and made a final visit to the car. He needed the jerrycan.

Back inside the cottage, Tipaldi went about splashing gasoline on floors, walls, furniture. Then he took off his jumpsuit, wrapped it around the tire iron, and soaked the bundle with the pungent fluid. He slung the last of it across a shiny upright piano. The sheet music folded open above the keyboard was entitled "Für Elise."

The killer's hands now reeked of gasoline. He placed the empty can beside the folded jumpsuit. Then he went to the kitchen sink, where he scrubbed his hands with hot water and a bar of yellow soap. It only remained to strike a match, then toss it onto the saturated pile and flee the building as it began to roar.

Looking back while he drove down the dirt road, Tipaldi saw flames reaching out of windows, spreading to the porch. His heart was pounding. It was a fine, senseless crime. It should make an outstanding book.

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A warning sounded inside his head. He had better stop somewhere and replace the discarded tire iron.

For days, the Vandervogel murders dominated the headlines. Amos and Alice Vandervogel had never hurt anybody. What mindless villain would want to destroy them in this barbaric way?

Tipaldi was reading aloud from the front page of the *Star*. Fred Howser was at the stove, making a mushroom omelet. "In reply to intense questioning from reporters, Chief Greb of the Baytown Police said he is pursuing a line of investigation. An arrest is expected soon."

"That means the killer must be local," Howser said. "Not like the wandering sociopath from your famous crime in Alberta."

"You just said a fascinating thing." Tipaldi pretended the idea was prompted by his friend's remark. "Perhaps I should take a closer look at this case. It might be the basis for a book."

"It could get you back on track." The TV producer set a steaming plate in front of his friend. "Your mood for the past month has been lethal."

"Will you come with me?"

Howser gave it some thought. "I could spare a week."

"Brilliant. I wonder if this Baytown has a decent place to stay."

They took a room with twin beds and bath on the second floor of the Coronet Hotel. The chiming of the town clock in its tower fronting the market square kept them awake on the first night, but not thereafter. The hotel served excellent meals in a small dining room with crisp white linen and sparkling crystal.

"How long has this been going on?" the Torontonians asked each other as they feasted on rare roast beef with an excellent burgundy.

Of greatest interest was the police station on the far side of the square. The low brick building faced an arena the size and shape of a Zeppelin hangar.

The visitors introduced themselves to Chief Greb, a portly man in a khaki uniform which was military in style. It included whipcord breeches tucked into polished brown leather boots that reached to the knee. There was also a matching Sam Browne belt. A cap with a leather visor rested upside down on the desk.

"This is an honor." Greb had heard of Nathan Tipaldi. He had not read his book, but he had seen the television adaptation.

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"Do I have your permission to visit the crime scene?" the writer asked.

"Feel free. I've completed my investigation out there. It's on Stoney Lonesome Road." The chief gave directions.

"To acquire atmosphere," Howser said, "we'll be roaming all over the area. Nathan wants to talk to anybody and everybody who knew the Vandervogels."

"Before long, the person who was closest to them will be right here in a cell. I intend to make an arrest."

"You know the murderer's identity?"

"Peter Dennison. He owns the farm down the road from Amos and Alice. He denies guilt, but I can make the case."

"This is fascinating," Tipaldi said. His heart was trying to escape his rib cage.

"Dennison is a drinker and a gambler. We've had to drag him out of the Coronet beverage room lots of times. We put him in an empty cell to sleep it off. He's a regular at the poker games upstairs over Hillier's Cigar Store."

"Is gambling legal here?"

"No, but it's traditional. Pete sometimes plays with money he doesn't have." Greb winked. "Dennison borrowed eight hundred dollars from Amos Vandervogel about a month before the murders. Said he needed money for repairs to a tractor. The repairs never got made."

"He gambled the money?" Tipaldi was making notes.

"We have an addict here," Howser murmured.

"We have a killer. There was a big argument outside in the square, couple of days before the murders. Amos confronted Dennison, demanded his money. A lot of people heard and saw what happened. Amos called him bad names. When Pete came at him, Amos knocked him down, bloodied his nose. That's when Pete said, 'I owe you a lot more than money now, Amos. And I intend to pay you back.'"

"That's motive of sorts," Howser said.

"And no alibi for the afternoon it happened. He told me he drove into Prince Edward County. That's across the bay. Sat in his truck and drank beer. Nobody saw him. He watched the sun go down, snoozed for a while. When he came back, he says, the fire department was just leaving the Vandervogel place."

Tipaldi put away his notebook. "The crime is so horrendous," he said. "When I heard of it, I thought it had to be the work of some

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individual without a conscience. A stranger who did this thing for a reason of his own. Which might be no reason at all."

"That's it exactly!" Greb slapped the desk. "Dennison intended it to look that way. He killed the Vandervogels for revenge. And for the eight hundred dollars. Then he made it look insane so he could get away with it." The policeman winked. "But that won't happen."

It was hard to find anybody in Baytown who did not know Amos and Alice Vandervogel. The librarian, with a scroll of gunmetal hair framing her cheeky face, said, "Alice was a Logan. They're all settled around Maynooth. Amos got to know her in high school. The two of them bussed down here. They were captains of opposing teams in the county spelling bee. Alice won by spelling 'Ecclesiastes.' They remained rivals for a time. Then Amos's father bought him a car for graduation and after that, there was no holding them."

"Any children?"

"Two. They're both in Centralia; one in insurance, the other in real estate."

The owner of Hillier's Cigar Store said, "Peter Dennison was always a hazard. Betting on a game of cards is supposed to be fun. But somebody who likes to lose—that puts me off."

"Dennison liked to lose?"

"He could never quit while he was ahead. He had to keep upping the ante. Everybody knew it. Stay with him and sooner or later you'll get all your money back. His too."

"That's an addiction."

"He was like a man on crutches. There was everybody else, and then there was poor, pathetic Pete." Hillier thought about it. "Losing gave him status."

For hour after hour, the visitors drove around town. Most streets were lined on both sides with giant maples, their leaves fallen now and raked into mounds. Bonfires spiced the air. There was no wind.

Howser aimed his car across the bay bridge, following a winding road up into the high land of Prince Edward County. Apple orchards thronged the slopes with rank upon rank of dwarf trees picked clean. They went all the way to Picton before turning back.

They were looking for a place to park near the hotel when Tipaldi saw the headlines in a copy of the *Baytown Banner* displayed in a shop window. "DENNISON IN CUSTODY!"

"Greb's arrested his murderer."

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"That settles where we spend tomorrow morning," Howser predicted "Behind bars with that poor sinner."

They had the turkey feast in the Coronet dining room, complete with candied yams and Brussels sprouts, followed by fresh, warm pumpkin pie. When they were standing in the lobby, Tipaldi had a faraway look in his eyes. He said, "Do you mind sitting in that big leather chair by yourself for a while?"

"What are you going to do?"

"I feel like calling Toronto and talking to Connie. I won't be long, but I need the room to myself."

Connie Tremayne was surprised to hear her husband's voice on the telephone. They were separated because he had become abusive when he began drinking too much. She said cautiously, "Is Baytown working for you?"

"They've arrested the murderer."

"You seem surprised."

"It came so quickly. In Alberta, they hunted Munro down over a period of months. This guy is a neighbor. It's cut and dried. He owed Vandervogel money, they quarreled publicly, Vandervogel beat him up, he swore he'd have his revenge."

"Like you say, cut and dried."

Self-doubt crept into the writer's voice. "I'm not sure I can do much with this material. I started out thinking it would be another *Sheer Terror*."

"You always say that at the beginning of a project. Once you get into it, you'll produce another bestseller."

"Can I do it Connie? That's what I want to hear."

"You've heard it." Then, because that sounded abrupt, she added, "Are you eating enough?"

When he put down the telephone, Tipaldi lay back on the bed and closed his eyes. What had happened to him? Was it merely the normal progress of a life? When he was younger, he had not felt this way— bloated and drained at the same time.

His first book had come out of him as naturally as a fat baby. There was the pain, but it had seemed inevitable. The prize-winning opus was hardly a novel, it was so much the stuff of his childhood. There was his gorgeous mother, her dancing school, the succession of young men: his prospecting father who kept returning from the north to show rock samples chipped from the glacial shield. There would be an exciting evening at the kitchen table, studying the dark shards. Then his father would be gone.

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Nathan Tipaldi swung himself up and put his boots on the floor. "What's done is done," he said out loud. He was not referring only to the distant past.

Greb left the Torontonians alone in a room with the prisoner. Dennison was not restrained; he was not going anywhere.

"Did you kill the Vandervogels?" Tipaldi might have been asking if the prisoner had a match.

"I could never do such a thing." Dennison had a smooth pink face with pleading eyes. By Baytown standards, he had spent a lot of money having his blond hair styled to cover his ears like folded wings. He sat forward on a wooden chair with elbows on knees, long fingers massaging the palm of one hand. "I wasn't even there."

"Greb says you have no alibi."

"There's nobody to vouch for me, he's right about that. I drove across the bay with a six-pack and parked at a place I know. It looks down on the lake. I drank beer while the sun went down. Is that a crime?"

"Sounds pleasant to me," Howser said.

"You had motive," Tipaldi suggested.

"The money I owed Amos? The fight in the market square? He didn't like me. But nobody likes me." Dennison's voice eased into a whine of self-pity. "Ask anybody. I'm useless. My farm is run-down. They won't let me in the card games because my IOUs are no good."

Half an hour later, as the visitors prepared to leave, Howser said, "Have you got a good lawyer?"

"Not yet. They aren't lining up to defend me. The town wants a sacrifice, and I'm their man."

Back in the hotel room, Tipaldi settled at the desk by the window with notebook and pen. He let his friend read the finished pages.

Howser spoke the title aloud. *Lethal Neighbor*. Then he concentrated on the narrative. When he finished, he said, "You're convicting the man before he's tried."

"He's obviously guilty."

"I'm not convinced." Howser set the notebook aside. "Anyway, long before your book comes out, the trial will be over. You'll be able to update the chapter."

"Actually," Tipaldi said, "I'm thinking of selling this material to the *Toronto Star*. Let them run it as an account of events as they happen."

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"The Baytown paper will pick it up."

"So?"

"It's bound to influence local opinion."

"They all believe he's guilty anyway." The writer began to wash his hands. "Don't be such a bleeding heart. Let's go eat."

Fred Howser decided it was time to go back to Toronto as soon as his companion began to sing. It was a children's song from his early school days. He performed it in a falsetto voice:

"This is October, good old October,
Sing ye children, sing!
The time when the apples are juicy and sweet,
And big shiny chestnuts fall down at your feet,
And flowers are quietly going to sleep,
Sing little children, sing!"

Tipaldi's eyes were closed, his head turned sideways, his cheek resting against flat hands held together. Howser said, "How about heading home?"

"Think we've done our work here?"

"I wish we could save Dennison."

"Leave him to the lawyers."

They packed their bags and descended the brass-rimmed steps to the lobby for the last time. Outside under the green canopy, waiting with the luggage while Howser backed his car into position, Tipaldi called, "Can I drive?"

It had been raining all day. Howser had no love for wet roads. "Be my guest."

They wheeled out of town, heading west on the old highway. As he drove, Tipaldi had time to think. Fred's belief in Dennison's innocence was irritating. It might even be dangerous. Good thing they were leaving Baytown where his companion's views might influence Chief Greb.

As for the death of the Vandervogels, that was tragic. But people died all the time. They might easily have been killed in a traffic accident. Illness could have taken one or both of them. How about suicide? Tipaldi could attest to the depressing aspect of life in general. A case could be made that the middle-aged farmers were well out of it.

His purpose now was to concentrate on the book. If he did his job well, something of value would rise from the ashes of the lost lives.

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After a few miles, Tipaldi made a careful turn onto a secondary road and drove north. "Humor me," he said before Howser could comment. "I'd like to return to the scene of the crime."

"What for?"

"I may never see this place again. It's important to me."

Twenty minutes later, the charred ruins of the Vandervogel farmhouse could be seen ahead through a mist of rain. "Your sense of direction takes my breath away," Howser said.

Tipaldi rolled the car to a stop at the end of the lane leading to the house. The two men sat without speaking and stared at the dismal scene past flopping wipers.

"Do me a favor?" Howser said.

"What?"

"Don't publish your story in the Toronto paper."

"Fred, you worry without reason. Dennison is going to be convicted, whatever I do. Because he's guilty."

"I don't agree. But that isn't my only reason for asking you not to publish." The television producer took his time. "It isn't ready. The writing is not up to your usual standard."

"What do you mean?"

"*Sheer Terror* was a work of art. You cared about the murderer. His guilt was established, but you empathized with the man behind the crime. You also had feelings for the murdered family. None of that sensitivity appears in what you've done over the last ten days. I can't put my finger on it." Howser searched his thoughts. "It's as if you despise the killer."

Tipaldi took in what his companion was saying. Fred believed his work in progress was inferior. Blood pounded in his head. He felt as if he might cry. After a long pause, he said, "I respect your opinion. I won't submit the first chapter. I'll set it aside and work on it."

"Good."

"Say it as if you mean it."

"I'm sorry. There's something really bad about this whole scene. Let's get out of here."

Tipaldi did his best to execute a three-point turn on the narrow road. But the car slipped on the wet surface and the rear end rolled into a ditch. The driver spun the wheels. Muddy gravel flew. The car slid back time and again as he kept trying to gain traction.

"You're not doing the tires any good," Howser said.

"I'm trying to free us," Tipaldi muttered.

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At last, the rear wheels took hold and the car lurched forward. But then, as they moved down the road, they both noticed an ominous sag.

"We have a flat," Howser said.

"At least the rain has stopped."

"Splendid. We can have a picnic."

The two men set about the task of changing a tire on a wet road with the light failing. Tipaldi opened the trunk. Howser found the jack. He hefted the tire iron.

"Where did this come from?" he asked. When Tipaldi just stared at him, he added, "My iron was a rusty old thing. This one is brand-new."

The writer took a moment. Then he said, "I bought the one you're holding."

"What for?"

"Because when I was out driving that day last month, remember? I had a flat tire. When I changed it, I forgot the iron on the roadside. I'd already driven on, so it was easier to stop and buy a new one."

"You never mentioned a flat tire."

"I'm mentioning it now."

Howser was staring at the shiny tool as if there was a profound truth inscribed on its surface in a language he was beginning to understand. Then he shifted the folded tarpaulin inside the trunk. Beneath the tarp rested the spare tire.

"You say you changed a flat?"

"Yes."

"I bought a new spare last year and haven't had to use it since. This is the one I bought. This tire is new. If you changed it, the old tire should be here."

It began to rain again, a steady drizzle. Tipaldi turned up the collar of his jacket. He said nothing. Howser spoke again. "You have some explaining to do, Nathan. They found a tire iron in the ashes. We'd better drive back to Baytown and see Chief Greb." As he said this, the author's friend held the tool in a defensive position.

Tipaldi had to laugh. "Do you think I'm going to attack you now, Fred?"

"You might."

The sky began to clear. The spare tire was bolted in place and the car rolled away down the road. Emerging sunlight put a smile on the writer's face. "I must have been crazy," he said. "I thought my

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book was more important than anything. Even the life of an innocent man."

"It's not too late. We'll go back and straighten things out."

Tipaldi knew his friend was right. It was not too late. At some point during the drive back to Baytown, he would spot his opportunity. Fred was not wearing a seat belt. If they went off the road and into a tree, the passenger's head should go through the windshield. If necessary, he could finish him with the tire iron.

"Slow down," Howser said. "The road is slippery."

Tipaldi maintained speed. "Just trying to conclude this nasty business," he murmured.

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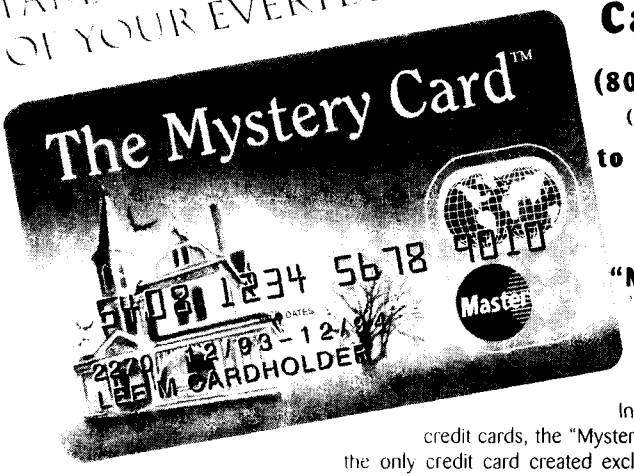

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a *NEW* short story by

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Like many of her compatriots, Shizuko Natsuki focuses more often on the psychology of a crime than on its manner of detection. The acting out of a commonplace emotion can be shocking in its consequences, and Ms. Natsuki conveys the horror of these unforeseen ramifications to an act as well as anyone in the genre . . .

SOLITARY JOURNEY

by SHIZUKO NATSUKI

"Miss Kayama, Miss Kayama!"

I was just leaving the entrance to the inn when I realized someone was calling me. I turned to find the landlady kneeling on the raised section of the entrance hall with a young girl of about twelve or thirteen standing behind her. It was easy to see that they were mother and daughter, as they shared the same delicate, refined features. It was the mother who had called me.

"You've forgotten something; this is yours, isn't it?" she said, taking a small wine-red handbag from her daughter and showing it to me.

I gave a weak smile and nodded.

"You left it over there," the young girl said and pointed to the rear of the lobby which was built out over the river. They had both seen me carrying the bag several times and as the only other guests were an elderly couple, it was obvious who it belonged to.

Looking at the young girl, my smile became much brighter, as I have a soft spot for children.

"You are right, I must have left it when I was reading the newspaper. Thank you," I said, taking it from her. My smile grew even broader. "What year are you in at school?"

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"The sixth grade."

"So you will be going to high school soon; is it far to school?"

"No, I just take the bus to Shuzenji."

"I see." Today was Sunday, which must be why she was at home. I put the small handbag into my case and looked out through the glass doors. A tree-lined drive wound its way up the steep hill towards the bus stop and sun shone brightly on the buds of the cherry trees. It was still only the beginning of March, but already the wind that blew over the River Kano held the promise of spring.

"It must look really beautiful when the cherry trees are in full bloom."

"Yes, there are some more trees a little farther down the Shimoda Road too, and when they all bloom at the end of March or the beginning of April, it is really superb. It's difficult to say just when they will bloom though," the landlady said.

"I see. I'd appreciate it then if you could send me a postcard when they are about seventy percent in bloom," I said, repeating my request of the previous night. "Then I can take some time off work and come and see them. There is nothing I like better than the sight of cherry blossoms," I said brightly. The landlady answered me with a slight bow.

"Well, I'll see you again in the spring then."

I waved goodbye to the little girl and turned towards the road.

"Thank you very much," they called out to me, and I could tell from their tone that I had made a good impression on them. I walked slowly up the hill, feeling very pleased with myself.

Weekend trips from Tokyo like this are one of my favorite pastimes. I work in a high-class boutique in the city center and live alone in an uptown apartment. My father is a doctor in a village in Gunma prefecture and recently my brother joined him in the practice, but I have not been to see them for two years now. Although I like children as a rule, I cannot seem to get on with those that are related to me, and I find my brother's children very noisy. Although I never go home these days, I often make short trips out from town. The boutique where I work is in an office building which is closed on Sundays and the other two salesgirls and I take it in turns to have the Saturday off.

I don't like hotels or inns that cater for group holidays but rather small, exclusive places where the owners only have two or three staff and can offer their customers personal treatment. These places are often very expensive but are frequented by executives and fa-

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mous people, so they seem to have no shortage of guests. A friend of mine from university worked for a travel agency and she kept finding new places near Tokyo for me to try.

When I arrived at an inn, I generally made friends with the owner's wife or one of the older maids, so when I asked them to write and let me know when the cherry trees would be in bloom or the maple leaves would turn red, they usually agreed, and I felt sure that a letter would arrive for Reiko Kayama at the beginning of April to tell her about the cherry blossoms.

I had not done so well with the handbag though. I changed my Boston bag to the other hand and gave a bitter smile. It would seem that things that are forgotten on purpose have a way of finding their way back to their owners.

It was just after the New Year's holiday when I had left a yellow pen case in the bathroom of the inn I was staying in at Kyoto. It had contained a Swiss army knife and a rather expensive ballpoint pen and although I rather grudged leaving them there, I could easily buy new ones when I got back to Tokyo. I had written my name inside, so I knew that as soon as the staff at the inn found it they would send it to the address I had written in the register.

However, I had only got as far as the Togetsu Bridge when a small boy of about nine called out to me. It was a boy I had played with at the inn the night before. He was very well behaved and I got the impression that he had been brought up in a good household.

"Are you leaving now?" he asked.

"Yes, and you?"

"No, we will be staying a little longer, but I was bored so I came along here to play."

He looked up at me and fidgeted for a few minutes before producing the yellow pen case from the pocket of his blazer.

"Isn't this yours?"

I gave a weak smile and opened it to check the contents. As I did so, I felt his eyes lock onto the red army knife. It was the kind with scissors, a tin opener, and countless other blades folded into the handle. I gave him the knife and then left him with a wave. I would probably have given the girl in the inn my handbag too if her mother had not been there. It always makes me feel good when I give a present to a child like that.

However, thanks to her finding it, it would not be sent on to Reiko Kayama as I had planned. Still, it had given me the chance to

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remind them to let me know when the cherry trees came into blossom, so it wasn't a complete waste of time.

At this point, I think I should mention that I do not know anyone named Reiko Kayama, which is why I failed to answer the landlady straightaway when she called me. I do know a Reiko Kagawa however: she is twenty-four and works in the same boutique as me. Although she is five years younger than me and joined the shop much, much later, she wasted no time in picking up one of the men who worked in another company situated in the same building, and at the end of last year they announced their engagement. They plan to hold the wedding in September, but at the moment her fiancé is abroad on a business trip and as a result I get shown postcards of Paris or London every day.

When I filled in the register at the inn, not only did I use a name similar to hers, I also used her fiancé's address, so at the end of March or the beginning of April he will receive a card from the landlady telling him that the cherry trees are almost in full bloom. He will probably guess that Reiko made a trip while he was away and not only used a false name, but his address as well. He'll conclude she would only have done this because she had another lover, and even if he doesn't reach that conclusion straightaway, I will have managed to sow the first seeds of doubt between them. This was the secret pleasure I enjoyed on my trips away from town.

It was about ten days after I got back from Izu, a Thursday in the middle of March at a little before seven o'clock, when the boutique was due to close, that the manager looked at the calendar in the back of the shop.

"Mrs. Sugimori has been off for three days now," he said half to himself.

Kozue Sugimori was the third assistant in the boutique. She had telephoned on Tuesday morning to say that she had a cold, but we had not heard anything since then. Mr. Ohki, the manager, had taken the call.

"She sounded very hoarse and said that she had a temperature, so I suppose she might still be in bed."

"Yes," I added, "they say that there is a very bad strain of Hong Kong flu around at the moment."

I don't know if Reiko was even listening. She was rearranging some scarves in a showcase, and by the blank look on her face it

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seemed that she was already on a date with her fiancé, in spirit if not body.

"If she is very bad, maybe I should go and see her." Mr. Ohki was in his forties and beginning to bald. He looked over at me for my opinion.

"Isn't her husband at home?"

"No, he has gone to Southeast Asia on business and won't be back until the fifteenth."

"She is on her own then."

Kozue was the only one of us who was married. She was younger than me, only twenty-seven, and she and her husband lived together in an apartment in the trendy part of town. He was a merchandiser or something for a clothing company and often had to travel both domestically and internationally, and as a result Kozue was left on her own a lot.

"If you have time, you couldn't pop in on her on your way home, could you? It is on your way . . ."

I could tell from the sly look on his face that he knew that I was single and would not have a date for the night and so had all the time in the world.

"Has she got a sore throat?"

"Yes, she was very hoarse; it sounded painful for her to speak."

That would probably mean that she was not faking. Her husband being away from home a lot, she had taken a clothes designer as a lover and often hinted about him to me.

"That is probably why she hasn't phoned," I said casually. "Okay, I'll stop by on my way home then."

"I'd be very grateful. It's a bit tricky for me to go, being a man and all. . . . You can leave early if you like."

"I'll do that then. I'm beginning to get a bit worried myself," I said, frowning with apparent concern as I made my way into the back room to get ready.

I looked in the mirror and had to admit that the face I saw there was beautiful. I am a well-built person and my face is also large and well defined, making me easily the best-looking person in the shop. The only problem was that my large well-shaped eyes slanted upwards slightly and my well-shaped mouth also turned up in the corners, giving me a slightly satanic look. When I go on my weekend trips, one of the things I enjoy is to talk to people and see their image of me change as they find out what a nice person I really am.

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I took the subway to Aoyama, and by the time I arrived at the four-story building where Kozue lived it was about ten past seven. The building was surrounded by a wrought-iron fence and bordered by a small lawn, making it look very exotic. Kozue had once mentioned to me that most of the occupants of the building were bar hostesses or rich men's mistresses, and it would appear that it was still a bit early in the day for them to be up and about as the brightly lit entrance hall was quite deserted.

I went up to the elevators and was just about to press the call button when one of them started to descend. I waited for it to arrive.

As soon as the door started to open a woman rushed out, almost bumping into me. She looked up at me for an instant, then turned away and hurried across the hall. She had a very nice russet-brown coat slipped over her shoulders and I got the impression that she probably worked in a bar or something.

I stepped into the empty elevator and pressed the button for the fourth floor.

The fourth floor was deserted but I had been to visit Kozue two or three times before and found her apartment without any difficulty.

I rang the bell but there was no answer. I knocked, but still the apartment was silent.

So, Kozue had gone off with her lover for a few days after all—or then again, she might be so ill that she could not come to the door. Maybe she had caught pneumonia and was unable to call for help. . . I panicked and tried the door, and to my surprise it opened. The lights were on in the apartment.

"Kozue . . . how are you feeling?" I called out as I entered the apartment. I walked into the living room and there she was.

She was lying face down on the floor next to the table, looking as if she had fallen out of her chair. There was blood pouring out of the neck of the grey turtleneck sweater she was wearing and it ran down her head and formed a large pool on the carpet below.

I called an ambulance, but the hospital telephoned to say that she died before she arrived there. By this time the flying squad and the local police had arrived and were making door-to-door inquiries.

I was questioned for some time by an assistant inspector from the local station called Takahama.

"So you say that she had caught a cold and had not been to work?" he asked. He was a good-looking, well-built sportsman-type of about thirty-five or thirty-six.

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"Yes, but it looks as if she felt well enough to get up, although judging by the turtleneck pullover her throat must still have been painful."

Seeing that I was comparatively calm, he said, "She was stabbed with a sharp knife just above the neck of the pullover. The carotid artery was cut, and that is what led to her death, although she was stabbed in three other places around the head and face. It was a very vicious crime," he explained. "Since the room has not been disturbed at all, we are inclined to think that the crime was committed by an acquaintance with a grudge against the victim. Have you any idea who might have wanted to harm her?"

"No, not at all, she was liked by everyone she met."

"And you have not heard any rumors about anyone wanting to get even with her husband?" When I said I hadn't, he asked me where her husband worked, and after I told him, he had one of his men get in touch with the company.

After thinking about it for a while, I told him that I believed Kozue had a lover who was a clothes designer called Sugimoto or something. I told them everything I knew or suspected, although this was only to help their investigations, and I made them promise to keep it all confidential unless her lover had actually been responsible. After all, I did not want to ruin Kozue's reputation now that she was dead.

Assistant Inspector Takahama seemed very interested in all I had to say and told me what he thought had happened.

"I think the victim showed the murderer into the living room and was attacked while they talked—which means that she knew her assailant. Not only that, but considering that she was still alive, even though she had been wounded so seriously, I think you must have arrived on the scene almost immediately."

The fact that the blood had not completely soaked into the carpet was also proof of this.

"Are you sure that you did not hear or see anything suspicious when you arrived?"

I suddenly realized with a jolt something I should have thought of earlier.

"Now you come to mention it, I did see something, in fact I almost got knocked over. . . ." I went on to tell him about my encounter at the elevator and he leaned forward eagerly.

"You are sure the elevator came from the fourth floor?"

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"Yes, without a doubt. I was just about to press the call button when I saw the light for the fourth floor go out and it did not stop anywhere else."

"And you say that she looked as if she worked in a bar or something?"

"Yes, that is the impression I got. Not many people wear their hair up these days, and as we passed I noticed the smell of perfume."

"How old was she?"

"I think she must have been over forty; she had very beautiful eyes but there were small wrinkles around them."

"Had you ever seen this woman before?"

"No, never."

"Would you know her if you met her again?"

"Yes, I might."

Assistant Inspector Takahama snapped his fingers and nodded.

"This is a very difficult case. We haven't got any evidence; even the murder weapon is missing, and you are our only witness at the moment—we might ask for your assistance again in the future."

He said it in a very offhand manner, but after that I was called down to the local police station regularly, and while I was there other detectives came to the boutique and interviewed the manager and Reiko Kagawa. Not only was I their most important witness, but as the person who first discovered the crime, I was also their main suspect. However, no matter how they searched, they could find no motive for me to kill Kozue, or anyone else for that matter, and if I was innocent, it meant that my evidence became all the more important.

The police finally decided that the woman I had bumped into outside the elevator was the murderer, and they repeatedly asked me to come to the police station to see if I could identify any of the women they were investigating.

I would arrive at the station and a detective would show me to a small dark room with curtains across one wall. The detective would draw the curtain and I would see the next room through a sheet of glass, where another detective would be interrogating a woman who sat facing me.

"They can't see you from in there. To them, this window looks like a mirror, so take your time and study them to see if any of them are the woman you saw in the lobby."

I was not told why these particular women had been chosen as suspects, but I felt sure that Kozue's lover's wife or her husband's

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lover must have been amongst them. However, although I tried to match their features to those of the woman I saw, it was impossible.

One day, about ten days after the murder, I was called down to the station for the seventh time. Assistant Inspector Takahama showed me through to the little room and drew the curtain. I took one glance at the woman in the next room and gave a gasp, then started to feel a little faint. She wore her hair up over a narrow forehead and finely penciled eyebrows. Today she was wearing an imported blouse like the ones I sell in the boutique and a suede vest, but there was no mistaking her.

"Have you seen her before?" Takahama asked, watching my face closely.

"Yes, that's her. That is the woman who almost bumped into me when the elevator doors opened."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, absolutely, she is just as I remember her, in her forties, sophisticated, and she looks as if she works in a bar."

"It is true that she works in a bar in Ginza. . . ." Takahama seemed to find it hard to believe that this was the murderer, and judging from her relaxed manner and the way she smiled every now and again, she did not seem to be undergoing a very severe interrogation.

"Have you ever heard the surname Fukao?" Takahama asked.

"No."

"Kozue Sugimori didn't mention her at all?"

"Not as far as I can remember." I did remember, however, that he had asked me the same question on another occasion. "Does that name hold some special significance?"

"Well actually, the victim had scribbled the name down on a pad next to the phone. It seems likely that someone called Fukao telephoned her and she jotted the name down, but neither her husband nor anyone else has been able to tell us who it may be."

"I see."

"Anyway, Fukao sounds like a surname, and put together with your statement about a woman in her forties who looked as if she worked in a bar, we decided to check all the bars in Tokyo for people who matched that description and were called Fukao. It was a big job, but luckily it is quite an unusual name and to date we have only come across three people who fit the description and we are presently making secret inquiries about them."

"Does that mean that this woman is called Fukao too?"

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"Yes, but as far as we have been able to ascertain, Kozue's husband has never been to her bar and she denies any knowledge of him. She lives in an apartment in Uguisudani with a young son, and although she does not have any regular male friends at the moment, I find it hard to believe that she has any relationship with the victim's husband. All the same, you are quite sure that this is the woman you saw in the lobby of the victim's building?"

"Yes." I said forcefully. The more I looked at her, the surer I became that this was the woman I had seen.

The woman lit a cigarette, and as she blew out a stream of smoke she stared me right in the eye. Even though she could not possibly see me, I felt a cold hatred in her look that seemed to be aimed directly at me.

Next day, I read in the evening newspaper that Terumi Fukao had been arrested, and next to the report was a photo of the woman I had seen the day before through the two-way mirror. It said that she had admitted to killing Kozue, but there were several points that were not clear and these were being investigated by the police.

The following day Assistant Inspector Takahama came to the boutique to see me, and I could tell from his relaxed attitude that the case had been cleared up.

"It is entirely thanks to your cooperation that we were able to catch the culprit, so I thought the least I could do would be to come and thank you," he said in a free and easy way.

"So that woman was the murderer then."

"Yes, when we started interrogating her she denied all knowledge of the affair, but when we told her that we had a witness who had seen her in the lobby of the victim's building and pressed her for an explanation, she became very agitated and finally admitted everything."

"So she was having an affair with Kozue's husband or something ?"

"No, she was not lying when she said that she did not know either of the Sugimoris. That day was the first time she had ever met Kozue. She had telephoned before she visited, and that was when Kozue had jotted down the name, just as we guessed. However, while they were talking she lost her temper and stabbed Kozue with the Swiss army knife she had with her."

"Army knife?"

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"Yes, she took us to her apartment where she had hidden it in the back of a drawer. It was one of those fat ones with scissors, nail clippers, and all kinds of blades that fold into the handle. There was also some dried blood on one of the blades and that matched the blood type of the victim."

"But didn't you say she had a young son? What is he going to do now that she has been arrested?"

Takahama gave me a funny look and I realized it must have sounded a rather strange thing to say, but I was only trying to change the subject to something I could cope with. Also, for some reason, the boy's fate seemed important to me.

"Actually he is in hospital at the moment. I suppose it is a good thing in a way, as it means he was not there to see us take his mother away in handcuffs."

"In hospital?"

"Yes, in fact it is very easy to sympathize with Fukao. Since she separated from her husband, she has devoted herself to raising her son, Akio, and in order that he would not miss his father, she lavished all her love on him. He is ten years old and he attends an exclusive private school. Although his mother has to leave him alone a lot while she is at work, her greatest pleasure is to close the bar and take him somewhere on a trip during the school holidays.

"However, she came back to her apartment one night in the beginning of February to find Akio, who should have been in bed, lying in the hall, his face covered with blood. She rang for an ambulance and got him to a hospital where he was treated. When he recovered consciousness he told her that he had tried to open a parcel that had been delivered with his knife, but he slipped and it went into his left eye. Luckily, he was not in a critical state, but there was a chance that he might lose his left eye."

"Oh no . . ."

"Terumi went home where she found the knife lying on the floor of the hall and had another shock. She had never given her son a knife—you often read about children with overprotective parents who have never held a knife and can't even sharpen a pencil without an electric sharpener—well, Akio was one of these."

"I see . . ."

"She asked him where he had got it, and he said that he was given it. During the New Year's holidays, she had taken him for a trip to Kyoto and a young woman who was staying in the same inn had left a pen case in the toilet. Akio found it, and when he gave it back

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to her she gave him the knife as a reward. He knew that his mother would take it away from him if she saw it, so he kept it hidden and played with it while she was out. That night he had tried to use it to open a parcel when he slipped and stabbed himself."

"I see ," I answered automatically.

"Anyway, after about a month of treatment, Akio lost the use of his left eye His mother told herself that she should be glad that at least he still had his right eye, when the child started to complain that that had become blurred too. The doctor told her that it was only an inflammation and would soon heal, but she took it very hard

"She found herself hating this stranger who would casually give a dangerous weapon to her precious son. She went down to the inn in Kyoto, and after explaining the circumstances got them to show her the guest book. The only person who fit the dates was a woman called Kozue Sugimoto, but the address belonged to a Kozue Sugimori She guessed that this person had probably gone to Kyoto with her lover and changed her name slightly so her husband would not find out but she was convinced that Kozue Sugimori was the person responsible for her son's injuries. She looked up her telephone number and after phoning, she went to visit her."

"But I suppose Kozue denied it."

"Exactly Fukao had not meant to get revenge on her when she first went. If she had, she would hardly have used her real name on the phone. She just wanted Kozue to know what she and her son had been through and make her apologize. However, even when she was presented with the knife, Kozue denied all knowledge of it and denied even having been to Kyoto at the New Year. Finally she accused Terumi of trying to blackmail her, and that was when Terumi lost control of herself and struck out blindly with the knife she was holding in her hand."

I heard a kind of explosion in my head and all the color seemed to fade away. I knew then that I would be locked in this gray, loveless world until the day I died. Needless to say, the person who had been to Kyoto and signed the guest book with Kozue's name in the hope that Kozue's husband would hear about it was none other than myself!

—translated by Gavin Frew

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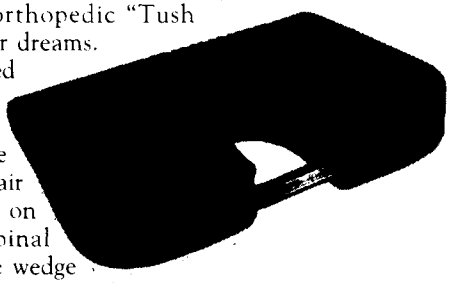

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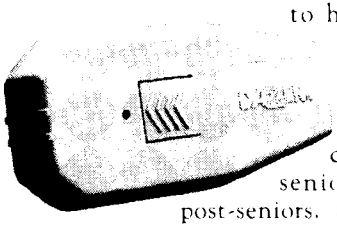

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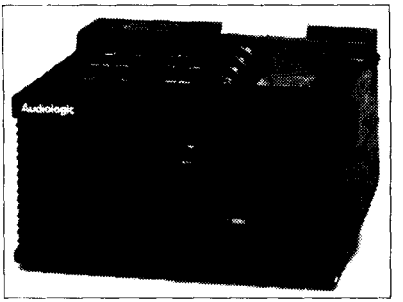

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a *NEW* short story by

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The beautiful Lake District of England seems almost too tranquil a setting for crime, but Mr. Barnard has always been able to use such backdrops well as he digs beneath the surface of apparently normal goings-on . . .

THE GENTLEMAN IN THE LAKE

by ROBERT BARNARD

There had been violent storms that night, but the body did not come to the surface until they had died down and a watery summer sun sent ripples of lemon and silver across the still-disturbed surface of Derwent Water. It was first seen by a little girl, clutching a plastic beaker of orange juice, who had strayed down from the small car park, over the pebbles, to the edge of the lake.

"What's that, Mummy?"

"What's what, dear?"

Her mother was wandering round, drinking in the calm, the silence, the magisterial beauty, the more potent for the absence of other tourists. She was a businesswoman, and holidays by the Lakes made her question uncomfortably what she was doing with her life. She strolled down to where the water lapped onto the stones.

"There, Mummy. *That."*

She looked towards the lake. A sort of bundle bobbed on the surface a hundred yards or so away. She screwed up her eyes. A sort of *tweedy* bundle. Greeny-brown, like an old-fashioned gentleman's suit. As she watched she realised that she could make out, stretching out from the bundle, two lines . . . *Legs.* She put her hand firmly on her daughter's shoulder.

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"Oh, it's just an old bundle of clothes, darling. Look, there's Patch wanting to play. He has to stretch his legs too, you know."

Patch barked obligingly, and the little girl trotted off to throw his ball for him. Without hurrying the woman made her way back to the car, picked up the car phone, and dialed 999.

It was late on in the previous summer that Marcia Catchpole had sat beside Sir James Harrington at a dinner party in St. John's Wood. "Something immensely distinguished in Law," her hostess Serena Fisk had told her vaguely. "Not a judge, but a rather famous defending counsel, or prosecuting counsel, or *something* of that sort."

He had been rather quiet as they all sat down: urbane, courteous in a dated sort of way, but quiet. It was as if he was far away, reviewing the finer points of a case long ago.

"So nice to have *soup*," said Marcia, famous for "drawing people out," especially men. "Soup seems almost to have gone out these days."

"Really?" said Sir James, as if they were discussing the habits of Eskimos or Trobriand Islanders. "Yes, I suppose you don't often . . . *get it*."

"No, it's all melons and ham, and pâté, and seafood cocktails."

"Is it? *Is* it?"

His concentration wavering, he returned to his soup, which he was consuming a good deal more expertly than Marcia, who, truth to tell, was more used to melons and suchlike.

"You don't eat out a great deal?"

"No. Not now. Once, when I was practising. . . . But not now. And not since my wife died."

"Of course you're right: people don't like singles, do they?"

"Singles?"

"People on their own. For dinner parties. They have to find another one—like me tonight."

"Yes . . . Yes," he said, as if only half-understanding what she said.

"And it's no fun eating in a restaurant on your own, is it?"

"No . . . None at all. . . . I have a woman come in," he added, as if trying to make a contribution of his own.

"To cook and clean for you?"

"Yes . . . Perfectly capable woman. . . . It's not the same, though."

"No. Nothing is, is it, when you find yourself on your own?"

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"No, it's not. . . ." He thought, as if thought was difficult. "You can't *do* so many things you used to do."

"Ah, you find that too, do you? What do you miss most?"

There was a moment's silence, as if he had forgotten what they were talking about. Then he said: "Travel. I'd like to go to the Lakes again."

"Oh, the Lakes! One of my favourite places. Don't you drive?"

"No. I've never had any need before."

"Do you have children?"

"Oh yes. Two sons. One in medicine, one in politics. Busy chaps with families of their own. Can't expect them to take me places . . . Don't see much of them. . . ." His moment of animation seemed to fade, and he picked away at his entrée. "What *is* this fish, Molly?"

When, the next day, she phoned to thank her hostess, Marcia commented that Sir James was "such a sweetie."

"You and he seemed to get on like a house on fire, anyway."

"Oh, we did."

"Other people said he was awfully vague."

"Oh, it's the legal mind. Wrapped in grand generalities. His wife been dead long?"

"About two years. I believe he misses her frightfully. Molly used to arrange all the practicalities for him."

"I can believe that. I was supposed to ring him about a book I have that he wanted, but he forgot to give me his number."

"Oh, it's two-seven-one-eight-seven-six. A rather grand place in Chelsea."

But Marcia had already guessed the number after going through the telephone directory. She had also guessed at the name of Sir James's late wife.

"We can't do much till we have the pathologist's report," said Superintendent Southern, fingering the still-damp material of a tweed suit. "Except perhaps about *this*."

Sergeant Potter looked down at it.

"I don't know a lot about such things," he said, "but I'd have said that suit was dear."

"So would I. A gentleman's suit, made to measure and beautifully sewn. I've had one of the secretaries in who knows about these things. A gentleman's suit for country wear. Made for a man who doesn't know the meaning of the word 'casual.' With a nametag

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sewn in by the tailor and crudely removed . . . with a razor blade probably."

"You don't *get* razor blades much these days."

"Perhaps he's also someone who doesn't know the meaning of the word 'throwaway.' A picture seems to be emerging."

"And the removal of the nametag almost inevitably means—"

"Murder. Yes, I'd say so."

Marcia decided against ringing Sir James up. She felt sure he would not remember who she was. Instead, she would call round with the book, which had indeed come up in conversation—because she had made sure it did. Marcia was very good at fostering acquaintanceships with men, and had had two moderately lucrative divorces to prove it.

She timed her visit for late afternoon, when she calculated that the lady who cooked and "did" for him would have gone home. When he opened the door he blinked, and his hand strayed towards his lips.

"I'm afraid I—"

"Marcia Catchpole. We met at Serena Fisk's. I brought the book on Wordsworth we were talking about."

She proffered Stephen Gill on Wordsworth, in paperback. She had thought as she bought it that Sir James was probably not used to paperbacks, but she decided that, as an investment, Sir James was not yet worth the price of a hardback.

"Oh, I don't . . er . . . Won't you come in?"

"Lovely!"

She was taken into a rather grim sitting room, lined with legal books and Victorian first editions. Sir James began to make uncertain remarks about how he thought he could manage tea.

"Why don't you let me make it? You'll not be used to fending for yourself, let alone for visitors. It was different in your generation, wasn't it? Is that the kitchen?"

And she immediately showed an uncanny instinct for finding things and doing the necessary. Sir James watched her, bemused, for a minute or two, then shuffled back to the sitting room. When she came in with a tray, with tea things on it and a plate of biscuits, he looked as if he had forgotten who she was, and how she came to be there.

"There, that's nice, isn't it? Do you like it strong? Not too strong, right. I think you'll enjoy the Wordsworth book. Wordsworth really *is* the Lakes, don't you agree?"

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She had formed the notion, when talking to him at Serena Fisk's dinner party, that his reading was remaining with him longer than his grip on real life. This was confirmed by the conversation on this visit. As long as the talk stayed with Wordsworth and his Lakeland circle it approached a normal chat: he would forget the names of poems, but he would sometimes quote several lines of the better-known ones verbatim. Marcia had been educated at a moderately good state school, and she managed to keep her end up.

Marcia got up to go just at the right time, when Sir James had got used to her being there and before he began wanting her to go. At the door she said: "I'm expecting to have to go to the Lakes on business in a couple of weeks. I'd be happy if you'd come along."

"Oh, I couldn't possibly—"

"No obligations either way: we pay for ourselves, separate rooms *of course,* quite independent of each other. I've got business in Cockermouth, and I thought of staying by Buttermere or Crummock Water."

A glint came into his eyes.

"It would be wonderful to see them again. But I really couldn't—"

"Of course you could. It would be my pleasure. It's always better in congenial company, isn't it? I'll be in touch about the arrangements."

Marcia was in no doubt she would have to make all the arrangements, down to doing his packing and contacting his cleaning woman. But she was confident she would bring it off.

"Killed by a blow to the head," said Superintendent Southern, when he had skimmed through the pathologist's report. "Some kind of accident, for example a boating accident, can't entirely be ruled out, but there was some time between his being killed and his going into the water."

"In which case, what happened to the boat? And why didn't whoever was with him simply go back to base and report it, rather than heaving him in?"

"Exactly. . . . From what remains, the pathologist suggests a smooth liver—a townee not a countryman, even of the upper-crust kind."

"I think you suspected that from the suit, didn't you, sir?"

"I did. Where do you go for a first-rate suit for country holidays if you're a townee?"

"Same as for business suits? Savile Row, sir?"

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"If you're a well-heeled Londoner that's exactly where you go. We'll start there."

Marcia went round to Sir James's two days before she had decided to set off North. Sir James remembered little or nothing about the proposed trip, still less whether he had agreed to go. Marcia got them a cup of tea, put maps on his lap, then began his packing for him. Before she went she cooked him his light supper (wondering how he had ever managed to cook it for himself) and got out of him the name of his daily. Later on she rang her and told her she was taking Sir James to the Lakes, and he'd be away for at most a week. The woman sounded sceptical but uncertain whether it was her place to say anything. Marcia, in any case, didn't give her the opportunity.

She also rang Serena Fisk to tell her. She had an ulterior motive for doing so. In the course of the conversation she casually asked: "How did he get to your dinner party?"

"Oh, I drove him. Homecooks were doing the food, so there was no problem. Those sons of his wouldn't lift a finger to help him. Then Bill drove him home later. Said he couldn't get a coherent word out of him."

"I expect he was tired. If you talk to him about literature you can see there's still a mind there."

"Literature was never my strong point, Marcia."

"Anyway, I'm taking him to the Lakes for a week on Friday."

"*Really?* Well, you are getting on well with him. Rather you than me."

"Oh, all he needs is a bit of stimulus," said Marcia. She felt confident now that she had little to fear from old friends or sons.

This first visit to the Lakes went off extremely well from Marcia's point of view. When she collected him, the idea that he was going somewhere seemed actually to have got through to him. She finished the packing with last-minute things, got him and his cases into the car, and in no time they were on the M1. During a pub lunch he called her "Molly" again, and when they at last reached the Lakes she saw that glint in his eyes, heard little grunts of pleasure.

She had booked them into Crummock Lodge, an unpretentious but spacious hotel which seemed to her just the sort of place Sir James would have been used to on his holidays in the Lakes. They had separate rooms, as she had promised. "He's an old friend who's been very ill," she told the manager. They ate well, went on drives

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and gentle walks. If anyone stopped and talked, Sir James managed a sort of distant benignity which carried them through. As before, he was best if he talked about literature. Once, after Marcia had had a conversation with a farmer over a dry stone wall he said:

"Wordsworth always believed in the wisdom of simple country people."

It sounded like something a schoolmaster had once drummed into him. Marcia would have liked to say, "But when his brother married a servant he said it was an outrage." But she herself had risen by marriage, or marriages, and the point seemed to strike too close to home.

On the afternoon when she had her private business in Cockermouth she walked Sir James hard in the morning and left him tucked up in bed after lunch. Then she visited a friend who had retired to a small cottage on the outskirts of the town. He had been a private detective, and had been useful to her in her first divorce. The dicey method he had used to get dirt on her husband had convinced her that in his case private detection was very close to crime itself, and she had maintained the connection. She told him the outline of what she had in mind, and told him she might need him in the future.

When, after a week, they returned to London, Marcia was completely satisfied. She now had a secure place in Sir James's life. He no longer looked bewildered when she came round, even looked pleased, and often called her "Molly." She went to the Chelsea house often in the evenings, cooked his meal for him, and together they watched television like an old couple.

It would soon be time to make arrangements at a Registry Office.

In the process of walking from establishment to establishment in Savile Row, Southern came to feel he had had as much as he could stand of stiffness, professional discretion, and awed hush. They were only high-class tailors, he thought to himself, not the Church of bloody England. Still, when they heard that one of their clients could have ended up as an anonymous corpse in Derwent Water, they were willing to cooperate. The three establishments which offered that particular tweed handed him silently a list of those customers who had had suits made from it in the last ten years.

"Would you know if any of these are dead?" he asked one shop manager.

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"Of course, sir. We make a note in our records when their obituary appears in the *Times*."

The man took the paper back and put a little crucifix sign against two of the four names. The two remaining were a well-known television newsreader and Sir James Harrington.

"Is Sir James still alive?"

"Oh certainly. There's been no obituary for him. But he's very old: we have had no order from him for some time."

It was Sir James that Southern decided to start with. Scotland Yard knew all about him, and provided a picture, a review of the major trials in which he had featured, and his address. When Southern failed to get an answer from phone calls to the house, he went round to try the personal touch. There was a For Sale notice on it that looked to have been there for some time.

The arrangements for the Registry Office wedding went without a hitch. A month after their trip, Marcia went to book it in a suburb where neither Sir James nor she was known. Then she began foreshadowing it to Sir James, to accustom him to the idea.

"Best make it legal," she said, in her slightly vulgar way.

"Legal?" he enquired, from a great distance.

"You and me. But we'll just go on as we are."

She thought about witnesses, foresaw various dangers, and decided to pay for her detective friend to come down. He was the one person who knew of her intentions, and he could study Sir James's manner.

"Got a lady friend you could bring with you?" she asked when she rang him.

"'Course I have. Though nobody as desirable as you, Marcia love."

"Keep your desires to yourself, Ben Brackett. This is business."

Sir James went through the ceremony with that generalized dignity which had characterised him in all his dealings with Marcia. He behaved to Ben Brackett and his lady friend as if they were somewhat dodgy witnesses who happened to be on his side in this particular trial. He spoke his words clearly, and almost seemed to mean them. Marcia told herself that in marrying her he was doing what he actually wanted to do. She didn't risk any celebration after the ceremony. She paid off Ben Brackett, drove Sir James home to change and pack again, then set off for the Lake District.

This time she had rented a cottage, as being more private. It was just outside Grange—a two-bedroom stone cottage, very comfortable

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and rather expensive. She had taken it for six weeks in the name of Sir James and Lady Harrington. Once there and settled in, Sir James seemed, in his way, vaguely happy: he would potter off on his own down to the lakeside, or up the narrow abutting fields. He would raise his hat to villagers and tourists, and swap remarks about the weather.

He also signed, in a wavering hand, anything put in front of him.

Marcia wrote first to his sons, similar but not identical letters, telling them of his marriage and of his happiness with his dear wife. The letters also touched on business matters: "I wonder if you would object if I put the house on the market? After living up here I cannot imagine living in London again. Of course the money would come to you after my wife's death." At the foot of Marcia's typed script Sir James wrote at her direction: "Your loving Dad."

The letters brought two furious responses, as Marcia had known they would. Both were addressed to her, and both threatened legal action. Both said they knew their father was mentally incapable of deciding to marry again, and accused her of taking advantage of his senility.

"My dear boys," typed Marcia gleefully. "I am surprised that you apparently consider me senile, and wonder how you could have allowed me to live alone without proper care if you believed that to be the case."

Back and forth the letters flew. Gradually Marcia discerned a subtle difference between the two sets of letters. Those from the MP were slightly less shrill, slightly more accommodating. He fears a scandal, she thought. Nothing worse than a messy court case for an MP's reputation. It was to Sir Evelyn Harrington, MP for Finchingford, that she made her proposal.

Southern found the estate agents quite obliging. Their dealings, they said, had been with Sir James himself. He had signed all the letters from Cumbria. They showed Southern the file, and he noted the shaky signature. Once they had spoken to Lady Harrington, they said: a low offer had been received, which demanded a quick decision. They had not recommended acceptance, since, though the property market was more dead than alive, a good house in Chelsea was bound to make a very handsome sum once it picked up. Lady Harrington had said that Sir James had a slight cold, but that he agreed with them that the offer was derisory and should be refused.

Southern's brow creased: wasn't Lady Harrington dead?

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There was clearly enough of interest about Sir James Harrington to stay with him for a bit. Southern consulted the file at Scotland Yard and set up a meeting with the man's son at the House of Commons.

Sir Evelyn was a man in his late forties, tall and well-set-up. He had been knighted, Southern had discovered, in the last mass knighting of Tory backbenchers who had always voted at their party's call. The impression Sir Evelyn made was not of a stupid man, but of an unoriginal one.

"My father? Oh yes, he's alive. Living up in the Lake District somewhere."

"You're sure of this?"

"Sure as one can be when there's no contact." Southern left a silence, so the man was forced to elaborate. "Never was much. He's a remote bugger . . . a remote sort of chap, my father. Stiff, always working, never had the sort of common touch you need with children. Too keen on being the world's greatest prosecuting counsel. . . . He sent us away to school when we were seven."

Suddenly there was anger, pain, and real humanity in the voice.

"You resented that?"

"*Yes.* My brother had gone the year before and told me what that prep school was like. I pleaded with him. But he sent me just the same."

"Did your mother want you to go?"

"My mother did as she was told. Or else."

"That's not the present Lady Harrington?"

"Oh no. The present Lady Harrington is, I like to think, what my father deserves. . . . We'd been warned he was failing by his daily. Dinner burst in the oven, forgetting to change his clothes, that kind of thing. We didn't take too much notice. The difficulties of getting a stiff-necked old . . . man into residential care seemed insuperable. Then the next we heard he's married again and gone to live in the Lake District."

"Didn't you protest?"

"Of course we did. It was obvious she was after his money. And the letters he wrote, or she wrote for him, were all wrong. He would *never* have signed himself 'Dad,' let alone 'Your loving Dad.' But the kind of action that would have been necessary to annul the marriage can look ugly—for *both* sides of the case. So when she proposed an independent examination by a local doctor and psychiatrist, I persuaded my brother to agree."

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"And what did they say?"

"Said he was vague, a little forgetful, but perfectly capable of understanding what he'd done when he married her, and apparently very happy. That was the end of the matter for us. The end of *him*."

Marcia had decided from the beginning that in the early months of her life as Lady Harrington she and Sir James would have to move round a lot. As long as he was merely an elderly gentleman pottering around the Lakes and exchanging meteorological banalities with the locals there was little to fear. But as they became used to him there was a danger that they would try to engage him in conversation of more substance. If that happened, his mental state might very quickly become apparent.

As negotiations with the two sons developed, Marcia began to see her way clear. Their six weeks at Grange were nearing an end, so she arranged to rent a cottage between Crummock Water and Cockermouth. When the sons agreed to an independent assessment of their father's mental condition and nominated a doctor and a psychiatrist from Keswick to undertake it, Marcia phoned them and arranged their visit for one of their first days in the new cottage. Then she booked Sir James and herself into Crummock Lodge for the relevant days. "I'll be busy getting the cottage ready," she told the manager. She felt distinctly pleased with herself. No danger of the independent team talking to locals.

"I don't see why we have to move," complained Sir James when she told him. "I like it here."

"Oh, we need to see a few places before we decide where we really want to settle," said Marcia soothingly. "I've booked us into Crummock Lodge, so I'll be able to get the new cottage looking nice before we move in."

"This is nice. I want to stay here."

There was no problem with money. On a drive to Cockermouth Marcia had arranged to have Sir James's bank account transferred there. He had signed the form without a qualm, together with one making the account a joint one. Everything in the London house was put into store, and the estate agents forwarded Sir James's mail, including his dividend cheques and his pension, regularly. There was no hurry about selling the house, but when it did finally go Marcia foresaw herself in clover. With Sir James, of course, and he was a bit of a bore. But very much worth putting up with.

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As Marcia began discreetly packing for the move Sir James's agitation grew, his complaints became more insistent.

"I don't want to move. Why should we move, Molly? We're happy here. If we can't have this cottage we can buy a place. There are houses for sale."

To take his mind off it, Marcia borrowed their neighbour's rowing boat and took him for a little trip on the lake. It didn't take his mind off it. "This is lovely," he kept saying. "Derwent Water has always been my favourite. Why should we move on? I'm not moving, Molly."

He was beginning to get on her nerves. She had to tell herself that a few frazzled nerves were a small price to pay.

The night before they were due to move, the packing had to be done openly. Marcia brought all the suitcases into the living room and began methodically distributing to each one the belongings they had brought with them. Sir James had been dozing when she began, as he often did in the evening. She was halfway through her task when she realised he was awake and struggling to his feet.

"You haven't been listening to what I've been saying, have you, Molly? Well, have you, woman? I'm not moving!"

Marcia got to her feet.

"I know it's upsetting, dear—"

"It's not upsetting because we're staying here."

"Perhaps it will only be for a time. I've got it all organised, and you'll be quite comfy—"

"Don't treat me like a child, Molly!" Suddenly she realised with a shock that he had raised his arm. "Don't treat me like a child!" His hand came down with a feeble slap across her cheek. "Listen to what I say, woman!" Slap again. "I am not moving!" This time he punched her, and it hurt. "You'll do what I say, or it'll be the worse for you!" And he punched her again.

Marcia exploded with rage.

"You *bloody* old bully!" she screamed. "You brute! That's how you treated your wife, is it? Well, it's not how you're treating me!"

She brought up her stronger hands and gave him an almighty shove away from her even as he raised his fist for another punch. He lurched back, tried to regain his balance, then fell against the fireplace, hitting his head hard against the corner of the mantelpiece. Then he crumpled to the floor and lay still.

For a moment Marcia did nothing. Then she sat down and sobbed. She wasn't a sobbing woman, but she felt she had had a sudden revelation of what this man's—this old monster's—relations had

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been with his dead wife. She had never for a moment suspected it. She no longer felt pity for him, if she ever had. She felt contempt.

She dragged herself wearily to her feet. She'd put him to bed, and by morning he'd have forgotten. She bent down over him. Then, panic-stricken, she put her hand to his mouth, felt his chest, felt for his heart. It didn't take long to tell that he was dead. She sat down on the sofa and contemplated the wreck of her plans.

Southern and Potter found the woman in the general-store-cum-newsagent's at Grange chatty and informative.

"Oh, Sir James. Yes, they were here for several weeks. Nice enough couple, though I think he'd married beneath him."

"Was he in full possession of his faculties, do you think?"

The woman hesitated.

"Well, you'd have thought so. Always said, 'Nice day,' or 'Hope the rain keeps off,' if he came in for a tin of tobacco or a bottle of wine. But no more than that. Then one day I said, 'Shame about the Waleses, isn't it?'—you know, at the time of the split-up. He seemed bewildered, so I said, 'The Prince and Princess of Wales separating.' Even then it was obvious he didn't understand. It was embarrassing. I turned away and served somebody else. But there's others had the same experience."

After some minutes Marcia found it intolerable to be in the same room as the body. Trying to look the other way, she dragged it through to the dining room. Even as she did so she realised that she had made a decision: she was not going to the police, and her plans were not at an end.

Because after all, she had her "Sir James" all lined up. In the operation planned for the next few days, the existence of the real one was anyway something of an embarrassment. Now that stumbling block had been removed. She rang Ben Blackett and told him there had been a slight change of plan, but it needn't affect his part in it. She rang Crummock Lodge and told them that Sir James had changed his mind and wanted to settle straight into the new cottage. While there was still some dim light, she went into the garden and out into the lonely land behind, collecting as many large stones as she could find. Then she slipped down and put them into the rowing boat she had borrowed from her neighbour the day before.

She had no illusions about the size—or more specifically the weight—of the problem she had in disposing of the body. She gave

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herself a stiff brandy, but no more than one. She found a razor blade and, shaking, removed the name from Sir James's suit. Then she finished her packing, so that everything was ready for departure. The farming people of the area were early to bed as a rule, but there were too many tourists staying there, she calculated, for it to be really safe before the early hours. At precisely one o'clock she began the long haul down to the shore. Sir James had been nearly six foot, so though his form was wasted, he was both heavy and difficult to lift. Marcia found, though, that carrying was easier than dragging, and quieter too. In three arduous stages she got him to the boat, then into it. The worst was over. She rowed out to the dark centre of the lake—the crescent moon was blessedly obscured by clouds—filled his pockets with stones, then carefully, gradually, eased the body out of the boat and into the water. She watched it sink, then made for the shore. Two large brandies later, she piled the cases into the car, locked up the cottage, and drove off in the direction of Cockermouth.

After the horror and difficulty of the night before, everything went beautifully. Marcia had barely settled into the new cottage when Ben Brackett arrived. He already had some of Sir James's characteristics off pat: his distant, condescending affability, for example. Marcia coached him in others, and they tried to marry them to qualities the real Sir James had no longer had: lucidity and purpose.

When the team of two arrived, the fake Sir James was working in the garden. "Got to get it in some sort of order," he explained, in his upper-class voice. "Haven't the strength I once had, though." When they were all inside, and over a splendid afternoon tea, he paid eloquent tribute to his new wife.

"She's made a new man of me," he explained. "I was letting myself go after Molly died. Marcia pulled me up in my tracks and brought me round. Oh, I know the boys are angry. I don't blame them. In fact, I blame myself. I was never a good father to them—too busy to be one. Got my priorities wrong. But it won't hurt them to wait a few years for the money."

The team was clearly impressed. They steered the talk round to politics, the international situation, changes in the law. "Sir James" kept his end up, all in that rather grand voice and distant manner. When the two men left, Marcia knew that her problems were over. She and Ben Brackett waited for the sound of the car leaving to go back to Keswick, then she poured very large whiskies for them.

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Over their third she told him what had happened to the real Sir James.

"You did superbly," said Ben Brackett when she had finished.

"It was bloody difficult."

"I bet it was. But it was worth it. Look how it went today. A piece of cake. We had them in the palms of our hands. We won, Marcia! Let's have another drink on that. We won!"

Even as she poured, Marcia registered disquiet at that "we."

Sitting in his poky office in Kendal, Southern and Potter surveyed the reports and other pieces of evidence they had set out on the desk.

"It's becoming quite clear," said Southern thoughtfully. "In Grange we have an old man who hardly seems to know who the Prince and Princess of Wales are. In the cottage near Cockermouth we have an old man who can talk confidently about politics and the law. In Grange we have a feeble man, and a corpse which is that of a soft liver. In the other cottage we have a man who gardens—perhaps to justify the fact that his hands are *not* those of a soft-living lawyer. At some time between taking her husband on the lake—was that a rehearsal, I wonder?—and the departure in the night, she killed him. She must already have had someone lined up to take his place for the visit of the medical team."

"And they're there still," said Potter, pointing to the letter from the estate agents in London. "That's where all communications still go."

"And that's where we're going to go," said Southern, getting up.

They had got good information on the cottage from the Cockermouth police. They left their car in the car park of a roadside pub, and took the lane through fields and down towards the northern shore of Crummock Water. They soon saw the cottage, overlooking the lake, lonely . . .

But the cottage was not as quiet as its surroundings. As they walked towards the place they heard shouting. A minute or two later they heard two thick voices arguing. When they could distinguish words, it was in a voice far from upper-crust:

"Will you get that drink, you cow? . . . How can I when I can hardly stand? . . . Get me that drink or it'll be the worse for you tomorrow. . . . You'd better remember who stands between you and a long jail sentence, Marcia. You'd do well to think about that *all the time*. . . . Now get me that scotch or you'll feel my fist!"

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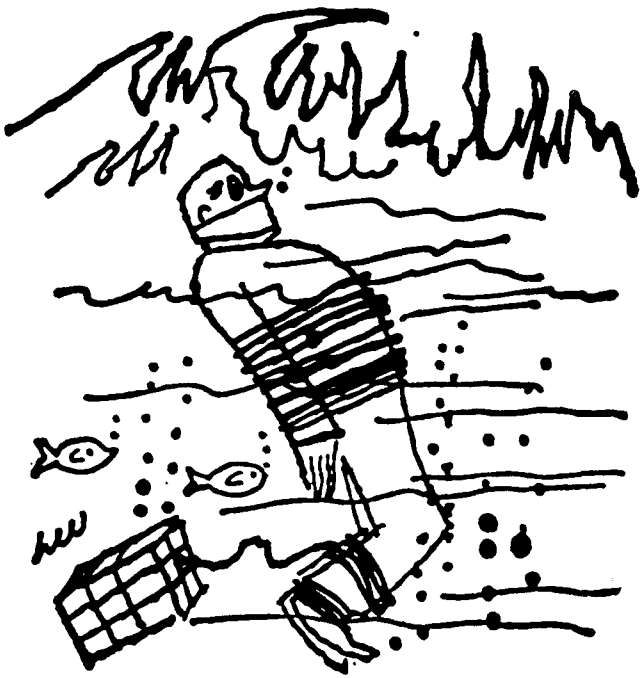
When Southern banged on the door there was silence. The woman who opened the door was haggard-looking, with bleary eyes and a bruise on the side of her face. In the room behind her, slumped back in a chair, they saw a man whose expensive clothes were in disarray, whose face was red and puffy, and who most resembled a music hall comic's version of a gentleman.

"Lady Harrington? I'm Superintendent Southern and this is Sergeant Potter. I wonder if we could come in? We have to talk to you."

He raised his ID towards her clouded eyes. She looked down at it slowly. When she looked up again, Southern could have sworn that the expression on her face was one of relief.



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DETECTIVERSE

FRANK A LA MOWED

by KATHERINE H. BROOKS

Frank is refusing to deal with the mowing,
  searching for places to hide, in the yard,
Disgusted at Nat for demanding it, knowing
  that Frank has a thing about working too hard.
"Where can I go so she never will find me,
  safely away from her critical eye?
Where shall I nap, with her nagging behind me?
  There! Where the grass nearly reaches the sky!"

Natalie climbs to the seat of her mower,
  spewing forth nasty remarks about men,
Certain there isn't a ne'er-do-well lower
  than Frank, who has taken a powder again.
Natalie scowls, and commences to mutter,
  searching for areas hopelessly high.
Where should she start with her powerful cutter?
  There! Where the grass nearly reaches the sky!

Frank is now sleeping devoid of seclusion,
  freed from his labors, and granted his way,
An innocent victim of sudden confusion—
  a pile of ground round, with a sprinkle of hay.
Natalie's spreading the spoils of her labor,
  fuming and sighing and cursing at fate,
Trusting she hasn't been seen by a neighbor,
  frantically raking what's left of her mate.

Months skitter by, with the Townies discussing
  Frank's disappearance, and Natalie's split.
In spite of the fighting and yelling and cussing,
  departure as sudden as theirs doesn't fit.
And as they conjecture and gossip and ponder,
  with scandalous thoughts of what happened to both,
The lawn's being mowed by the buyers, who wonder
  what causes that patch of luxuriant growth.

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a *NEW* Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

The Dr. Sam Hawthorne stories are among your editors' favorites, for they almost always combine a good puzzle with Mr. Hoch's flair for historical detail. The following story, which can be loosely classified as of the "impossible crime" variety, is no exception.

THE PROBLEM OF THE MISSING ROADHOUSE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

It might never have happened if the clouds from an approaching cold front had not moved in to obscure the full moon on that pleasant August evening in 1938. Jack and Becky Tober were driving home from the Friday night square dance at the Grange Hall in Northmont. It was just after eleven o'clock and Becky was pleading with her husband to surrender the wheel of the Dodge to her.

"You've had too much to drink, Jack. Let me drive."

He turned on her gruffly, pushing her hand from the wheel. "I could drive us home in my sleep. Just watch for the road sign."

The sign, on the right side of the dirt road, would show an arrow indicating a left turn with the words Turk Hill Road. It was a tricky stretch to maneuver after dark on a cloudy night, and Jack Tober had to keep his attention on the rutted roadway every inch of the way. "You sure we haven't passed it, Becky?"

"No, it's still ahead. Are you all right?"

"Fine."

"You didn't sound it when you were arguing with Foster over that last beer, and then going out to the parking lot with him."

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"All he wants to talk about is the Spanish Civil War. What in hell do I care if Franco captured Vinaroz? All he—"

"There's the sign, Jack. Turn here!"

"Damn! Almost missed it." He turned left onto the narrow dirt road and started up the gentle hill toward their farm. It was not a big place by local standards—less than forty acres—and after buying it a few years back they'd converted it into an apple orchard, with some vegetables and a few chickens as sidelines.

"Watch where you're driving, Jack. You'll have us in a ditch."

"Damn road gets narrower every time I drive it!"

They topped a slight grade and suddenly he saw lights ahead. They were on the left, almost across from where their farm should be. There should be nothing but woods there, not the low building and the tiny parking lot that were coming into view. "What is this, Becky? We're on the wrong road."

He slowed and peered out the window on his side of the car. It seemed to be a roadhouse, with music and voices coming from inside. There was a tall man standing by one of the six or eight cars and Jack called to him. "Where am I? What is this place?"

The man motioned toward the neon sign on the side of the building. "The Apple Orchard. Come on in."

Jack Tober was shaking his head. "The apple orchard is where we live. We own it."

"You must mean the orchard across the road. That's where the place got its name."

Jack saw nothing but darkness across the road. "My farm's nowhere near a roadhouse. I must have the wrong place."

The man stepped closer. His face was rough and weathered, and he wore a peaked nautical cap. "If you've never been here you should come in for a beer."

Becky spoke up. "You've had enough, Jack. I just want to go home. Back up and we'll turn around."

He shifted the car into reverse and started backing up. Almost at once there was a thud as he hit something. "What was that?"

"God, you've hit Lenny!" the man in the cap shouted. "Go forward!"

"Lenny who?" Jack grumbled, but he and Becky were out of the car instantly, hurrying to the rear where the man stood over a crumpled body.

"Is he breathing?" Becky said.

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"Can't tell," the man said. "We'd better get him in to the hospital right away."

Jack's hand came away from the body covered with blood. The sight of it sobered him instantly. "Somebody call an ambulance."

"It would be faster if you could drive him to the hospital," the man said.

"In my car?" Jack was thinking of the stranger's blood on his upholstery.

But Becky quickly overcame his obvious reluctance. "Help get him in the backseat, Jack. I'll get the lap robe from the trunk."

"All right."

The injured man was around thirty, with brown hair. He was dressed in a suit and tie, and the marks of Jack Tober's tires were obvious across his head and body. They got him into the backseat, wrapped in the robe, and Becky said, "I think he's dead."

"Drive him to Pilgrim Memorial Hospital," the man in the cap said. "I'll get my car and follow behind you."

Jack shifted gears and they turned around in the nearly empty parking lot. "Do you want me to drive?" Becky asked, the tension obvious in her voice.

"I'm fine. That sobered me up in a hurry."

They headed back down the road with the unconscious man, not waiting for the man who was following. Jack realized suddenly that he didn't even know that person's name. In ten minutes they were at the hospital, pulling up at the emergency room entrance.

"Accident victim," Jack told the nurse on duty.

She hurried out to the car with stretcher-bearers. "What happened to him?" she asked, searching for a pulse.

"I backed into him with my car."

"I believe this man is beyond help."

"You mean he's dead?" Becky asked. "I was afraid of that."

A few moments later, when a young doctor had verified the fact of death, he told Jack and Becky, "We'll have to notify Sheriff Lens about the accident. I'd suggest you remain here until he arrives."

I heard all this from Jack Tober later (old Dr. Sam Hawthorne reminisced) but the following morning when Sheriff Lens showed up at my office I knew nothing about it. "You free right now, Doc?" he asked, poking his head in at the door while I was going over the past-due accounts with my nurse, Mary Best.

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"For fifteen minutes," I answered, glancing at the clock. "Come on in. What's up?"

"Man named Lenny Blue was killed in an auto accident last night. There's something not quite right about it."

"What would that be?"

Sheriff Lens was all the way into the office now, tipping his cap to Mary. "Sorry to interrupt. Did either of you ever hear of a roadhouse called the Apple Orchard?"

We both shook our heads. "Is it near here?" Mary asked.

"Somewhere around Turk Hill Road, or at least that's where the Tobers say it is."

"Jack Tober?"

The sheriff nodded. "He a patient of yours, Doc?"

"I treated him once for the flu when Dr. Webster was away. Exactly what happened?"

"They tell a strange story. Jack and Becky were driving home from the square dance last night when they took a wrong turn or something. They ended up at this roadhouse, the Apple Orchard. A man in the parking lot spoke to them but they didn't get his name. Tober was backing up when he hit something. He'd run over Lenny Blue, who was apparently standing behind the car."

"Lenny Blue." Mary repeated the name. "I believe he was brought into the hospital once before with some sort of mental problem."

"Tall, gangly fellow in his twenties. Nobody knows much about him, except that he was a bit crazy."

"Is he from Northmont?" I asked.

"He was rooming with Mrs. Goutski over on Cedar Street. Been there about a year. Worked as a hired hand picking apples and things in season."

"The Apple Orchard."

"Yeah, it fits," Sheriff Lens said sadly. "Only trouble is, there's no such place anyone can find."

I glanced at the office clock. "There's a patient due in a few minutes, and two more after that. Then I'll be free for the rest of the day. There are no house calls scheduled after lunch, are there, Mary?"

She checked the appointment book. "Not today."

"Then I'll have a talk with Tober and his wife."

That was how I finally heard the story of what happened the previous night. Just after lunch, Jack Tober sat across from me in my office and narrated it in detail, as if discussing a particularly vivid motion picture he'd just seen down at the Northmont Cinema.

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From time to time he'd turn to his wife Becky for verification and she would nod or correct him on a minor point.

"What about this man who followed you to the hospital?" I asked when he'd finished.

Tober simply shook his head. "He never showed up. I suppose he didn't want to get involved."

"You didn't get his name?"

"No."

It was then that Sheriff Lens entered the office and handed me a note. I read it quickly and said, "It seems that you have a problem, Mr. Tober."

"Why? Because the man died?"

"More than that. The autopsy shows a bullet wound in the head. Lenny Blue was murdered."

While the sheriff went off to question Mrs. Goutski, the woman who'd been renting the apartment to Lenny, I decided it might be worth my time to retrace the Tobers' route of the previous night while it was still fresh in their minds. Sheriff Lens had impounded their Dodge, looking for evidence of the accident, so we took my Buick and headed to the Grange Hall where their adventure had begun.

"Do you come here often?" I asked as we drove up and parked in front of the Grange Hall. I knew they had frequent dances, often with out-of-town bands, and the previous year I'd been involved in a murder investigation there.

"Sometimes on Wednesdays," Becky explained. "They have square dancing on Wednesdays." She patted her husband on the shoulder. "But this guy has too many beers and has trouble driving home."

"I was all right," Jack Tober mumbled, perhaps a bit embarrassed by her words.

"So you were driving?"

"Yes."

"You pulled out of the parking lot and headed—where?"

"Toward home. Our farm and orchard are on Turk Hill Road."

I started the Buick and headed that way, turning right on Fairfax. It was a dirt road with three dirt roads off to the left before one encountered the first right turn. The second of these was Turk Hill Road. "You're sure this is where you turned?" I asked.

"I saw the sign," Becky confirmed.

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It was the only one of the three roads with a sign, probably because the Tobers and other families lived on it. Except for an occasional fruit stand and one or two farms, I knew of nothing on the other roads. Certainly I had no patients on either of them. Turk Hill Road, on the other hand, was a bit wider and smoother, a tribute to the heavier traffic generated by the several orchards that lined it.

Driving along it now, I tried to imagine what it might have been like the previous night, shrouded in darkness with even the moon hidden by clouds. Both sides of the road were lined with fruit trees. Even the farmhouses were set far back, connected to Turk Hill Road only by dirt or cinder driveways. "It wasn't this far," Tober said suddenly. "We're almost to our place on the right."

"I'll keep going. You might have been fooled by the darkness."

Before long we came to the next crossroads and I had to admit they were right. Not only was there no roadhouse—there was not even space for a roadhouse. I turned around and headed back along Turk Hill Road, driving more slowly this time. Still there was nothing.

"We'd better try the other roads," Becky Tober suggested half-heartedly. "It's got to be somewhere."

The next road to the north, called simply North Road, was even worse, with only one driveway to a distant farmhouse. We pulled in at a large fruit stand, its front opened to reveal boxes of newly picked plums, cherries, peaches, corn, and tomatoes.

"Any melons yet?" I asked the stout woman who came out to wait on us.

"Should have some tomorrow. Try us in the afternoon."

I glanced up and down the road. There were no other cars in sight, though the stand was probably large enough to accommodate a dozen drive-in customers at one time. "Not much traffic on this road, I guess."

"They know we're here. Aunt Peachy's. I been open ten summers now."

"I guess I don't come on the North Road much. Is there a roadhouse around here? A place called the Apple Orchard?"

"Roadhouse?" she said with a snort. "Ain't one o' them in the whole county, is there?"

"Not that I know of."

The Tobers had gotten out of the car and when she recognized them Aunt Peachy called out, "You gonna have some of them good apples for me soon?"

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"A few more weeks," Jack Tober promised. "I'll be over with a few baskets."

As they drove on along North Road, I said, "I didn't know you knew her."

"She sells some of our apples," Becky explained. "All the farms and orchards around here supply her."

There was nothing on the rest of North Road, not even a driveway. On the way back we waved to Aunt Peachy.

I was driving back to town when I remembered we hadn't tried South Road, the first left turn off Fairfax Road. We didn't expect to find anything there, but we were wrong. We hadn't gone a half-mile before we came upon the still-smoldering ruins of a barn fire. It was on the left, but Tober insisted it wasn't far enough along the road.

"Even if we took the wrong turn somehow, we drove farther than this. I'm sure of it!"

I pulled the car to a stop in the tall grass along the road. A man in overalls was inspecting the remains of the barn, and I recognized Sy Holden. "What happened, Sy? This your barn?"

He walked over to the car. "It *was* my barn, Doc. Burned down sometime toward dawn. By the time I got the volunteers up here there was nothing left."

Sy had been farming the area for as long as I'd lived in Northmont, and though he'd never been a patient of mine I knew him from town meetings and the like. His farm fronted on the main road, but he'd acquired the Sawyer place when the old man died and kept this barn as an auxiliary. It was a mile or more from his farmhouse, which was why he hadn't discovered the blaze sooner.

"There was no lightning last night," I observed, "though it was cloudy."

"It could have been kids, or hobos camped out in there. I'm just glad I didn't keep any animals out here. All I lost was the barn and some hay."

"Did you see or hear anything unusual earlier—before midnight?"

"Like what?"

"Maybe a gunshot."

"Nothing like that. This road is so desolate that any car late at night attracts attention, but we're too far away for it to bother us. Once I came out here after dark searching for a stray calf and heard voices, but I didn't bother to investigate. You catch people doing something they shouldn't be doing and sometimes they get angry."

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"True enough," I agreed. "Ever hear of a roadhouse on these back roads, a place with drinks and music called the Apple Orchard?"

Sy Holden shook his head. "Nothing like that around here. I'd have heard if there was. People want to drink, they go into town."

We drove back into Northmont after that. If the Apple Orchard existed, no one knew of it. Jack Tober and his wife were more disturbed than ever. "We were there!" Becky insisted. "We saw it."

"We spoke with the man in the peaked cap!"

"Phantoms," I told them. "You're part of a murder investigation now, and you'll need hard facts to back up your story. Right now there's nothing to back it up."

"Did you search his pockets? Maybe he had matches from that Apple Orchard place."

"No matches," I told them, though I hadn't looked personally. I remembered something else that had been on the autopsy report when I read it. "And no alcohol."

"What?"

"Lenny Blue hadn't had a drink before he died. Don't you think that's odd if you really did run over him outside a roadhouse late at night? Why else would he have gone there except to drink?"

Jack Tober seemed deflated. "I don't know," he admitted.

For all of my debunking, I didn't find the Tobers' story completely unbelievable. My years in Northmont had taught me that a murder can often be surrounded by the most bizarre circumstances. It seemed to me that the victim was the only lead we had at the moment, the largest and only clue to what had happened on Turk Hill Road the previous night.

I couldn't find Sheriff Lens to discover what he'd learned from the victim's landlady, so after dropping off Tober and his wife I decided to call on Mrs. Goutski myself. She was one of the relative newcomers to Northmont, having moved from Boston about five years earlier. Despite her Eastern European origins she spoke English quite well. I guessed her age to be in the early forties and she was still attractive, even in the somewhat plain dresses she usually wore. I'd never heard her first name, nor did I know anything about her husband. She'd been simply Mrs. Goutski since she came to Northmont and bought the house where Lenny Blue had rented a room.

"I already spoke to the sheriff," she said when she responded to my knock. "Now I got to speak to the doctor?"

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"You don't have to speak to anyone, Mrs. Goutski," I said. "I'm just helping out Sheriff Lens. Did you know Lenny Blue well?"

"What's to know? He was quiet and he paid his rent on time."

"Did the sheriff look at his room."

"I showed him, yes."

"Do you think I could see it too?"

She hesitated and then stepped aside, allowing me to enter the sparsely furnished downstairs. "I'll get the key."

She returned clutching a slender key of the most common sort and led the way upstairs. Perhaps from force of habit, she knocked gently at the dead man's door before inserting the key. The furniture here was as sparse as downstairs—a single bed, a faded couch, a straight-backed wooden chair, and a small table.

"You rented it furnished?" I guessed.

"Yes. He had nothing but that suitcase and some clothes in the closet. The sheriff said he'd send a deputy to pick everything up and hold it for the next of kin."

I walked around, casually opening drawers and trying to seem as if I wasn't searching the place. There was nothing unusual or out of place until I lifted a set of underwear in the bottom drawer and found a framed photograph face down beneath it. The picture showed the Nazi leader Adolf Hitler addressing a large open-air rally of the sort that was becoming increasingly common in Germany.

"What's that?" Mrs. Goutski asked.

"Just a picture." I returned it to the drawer. "I guess there's nothing much here."

"He didn't have much. He was a lonely man nobody cared about."

"Somebody cared enough to kill him," I reminded her.

Later, back at my office, I told Mary Best what I'd found. "He had a framed picture of Hitler hidden in his dresser drawer. That struck me as a bit unusual."

"I've read in the papers that the Bund is very active these days—the German-American Volksbund. With Germany mobilizing for possible war, they want to keep America out of it."

I thought about that. Lenny Blue hardly seemed a typical Bund member, but I'd never met any of them personally, so how would I know? "Bund or not, what was he doing at a roadhouse that doesn't exist, and why was he killed in such a way as to frame the Tobers for it?"

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"They just happened along," Mary suggested. "It couldn't have been planned in advance."

"Then where is this roadhouse? We went over every inch of Turk Hill Road—"

"Then it's not on Turk Hill Road. It's somewhere else."

"His wife saw the sign."

"Signs can be changed. Let's drive out there and look at that signpost right now."

It seemed like a good idea, especially since I was at a dead end. It was not the first time that Mary had put me on the right track. We drove out Fairfax Road in my car and pulled onto the grass to park near the sign with the arrow pointing up Turk Hill Road.

Mary tried to shake the signpost without success. It wouldn't budge. Then she got down on her knees and poked around in the tall grass surrounding it. "This hasn't been moved," she decided finally. "The dirt hasn't been disturbed anytime recently."

"So much for that theory."

But Mary Best didn't give up that easily. "They could have used a fake signpost at one of the other roads. As long as we're here, let's check."

We spent the next half-hour carefully inspecting the ground opposite North Road and South Road. There was no hole, no evidence of tampering. "There was no signpost recently at either of these locations. If they saw the sign for Turk Hill Road, that's what it was."

So we drove over the road once more, slowing to a stop at the driveway into the Tober farm. "They seem to think it was almost across the street from their place," I said. "I saw nothing from the car but let's walk around over there."

We strolled around for another twenty minutes, but there was nothing. Where the roadhouse parking lot would have been there was only a strip of grass, then a field of fir trees standing in stately lines. In another year they'd probably be cut and sold for Christmas trees in the city.

"No roadhouse here," I said. "If it wasn't for the body, I'd say the Tobers were both drunk last night."

"But there is that inconvenient body."

We drove back to the office and I phoned Sheriff Lens. "Any new developments, Sheriff?"

"I tried to call you, Doc. The D.A.'s not satisfied with Jack Tober's story. He thinks Tober and Lenny Blue got into a fight and Tober shot him, then made up the story about the accident in hopes that

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the bullet wound wouldn't be noticed with the other injuries."

"Tober's wife backs his story."

"Wives do that, don't they?"

"How well did you search Lenny Blue's room?"

"I didn't search it at all, just looked around. I told Mrs. Goutski we'd send for his things."

"I looked around too. Blue had a picture of Hitler in one of his drawers."

"You think the killing was political? In his story about last night Tober mentioned arguing with Dave Foster about the Spanish Civil War."

I'd remembered that too. "Maybe I should talk with Foster. You're not going to arrest Jack Tober today, are you?"

"Well—"

"Hold off a bit, will you? I want to find the Apple Orchard first."

"Doc, there is no Apple Orchard. This isn't one of your impossible crimes. It's just a killer telling a lie."

"Maybe, maybe not. Give me till morning before you do anything."

"All right," he agreed reluctantly. We'd been through a lot together and he respected my opinions. "But I'll have to move on this tomorrow."

Dave Foster worked at the gas station across from the town square. I found him just sending a satisfied customer on his way with one of the red fireman's helmets they were giving away that month. He was a pleasant fellow in his late thirties and I had no idea what his politics were.

"Dr. Hawthorne! Shall I fill 'er up?"

I emerged from the Buick. "Do that, Dave. I wanted to ask you something while I'm here."

"What's that?"

"You saw Jack Tober and his wife at the Grange dance last night, didn't you?"

"Sure. We had a couple of beers, talked about things."

"The Spanish Civil War?"

A slow smile spread across his face. "I didn't think he'd remember. See, I was chatting with that lady who runs the fruit stand, Aunt Peachy, and the Tobers came over. She'd just said something about Franco, seemed pleased that he'd captured Vinaroz back in April. I was talking about it and Jack had just enough beer in him to make an argument of it. He's like that when he drinks. We left the women and the table and went outside to cool off. I thought for a minute he

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was going to fight me, but he was all right." He pushed the nozzle of the gasoline hose into the car's tank and squeezed the handle. I watched the fuel bubbling past the little window on the pump. "Pretty soon he went back to join the ladies and he bought beers all around."

"What time was all this?"

"Around ten-thirty, I think. Becky wanted to get going and they left soon after that."

I nodded. Jack Tober had said they left just after eleven. "Did you know Lenny Blue well?"

"He came by the station and we talked sometimes. Can't say I knew him well. He was a bit weird."

"Did he ever go to the Grange dances?"

Foster snickered and finished filling my tank. "Can't say I ever saw Lenny with a girl."

I paid for the gas and drove back toward the hospital and my adjoining office. I'd collected lots of information about the previous night, but I still didn't know what had really happened. I still didn't know how a roadhouse could appear for a brief time and then vanish, leaving no trace except a dead man with a bullet in his head.

As I entered the office I was surprised to find Jack Tober waiting for me. "Hello, Jack. Any messages, Mary?"

She shook her head. "Just Mr. Tober. He phoned earlier and then came in to wait for you."

"Come into my office, Jack. Is Becky with you?"

"She's at the sheriff's office, waiting for them to release our car. I told her I'd see her at home. This business has lost me a whole day of work."

It was almost five o'clock, later than I'd realized, and I told Mary, "You go on home. I'll lock up." Then I turned my attention back to Jack. "How can I help you? Is it a medical problem?"

"It's just this damned killing. I know Sheriff Lens doesn't believe me. I'm afraid he's going to charge me with murder. He's been talking to people at the Grange Hall and some of the bars about how I get belligerent after a few beers."

"Do you?"

"Not often. I've had one or two fistfights, but never anything with a gun. I don't even own a gun except for a hunting rifle I use during deer season."

"What do you want me to do, Jack?"

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"I read about how doctors can determine the time of death with a fair amount of accuracy. Maybe the autopsy can show Blue was dead hours before we got to the roadhouse."

I shook my head. "I've read the entire report. Time of death was estimated at somewhere around eleven o'clock—maybe a half-hour before you reached the hospital with him."

"Doesn't Becky's word count for anything?"

"The person you really need is the mysterious man in the peaked cap. He must know more than he admitted at the time." I thought of something else. "These fistfights you mentioned—were any of them with Lenny Blue?"

"Of course not! I didn't even know him."

"But you know Sy Holden."

"Sure, I know Sy. What about it?"

"It just seems like a coincidence that his barn burned to the ground the same night as the killing."

"A barn's not a roadhouse."

"No, it isn't," I agreed. "I'm leaving now. Want a ride home?"

"It's out of your way."

"I don't mind. Maybe we can get an idea on the way."

We headed up Fairfax Road, once more retracing the route Tober had taken the previous night. It was when we'd reached the corner of Turk Hill Road, as I was about to turn left, that a green roadster came down the hill fast and Jack Tober gripped my shoulder. "It's him! It's the man from the roadhouse!"

I saw the face in profile, saw the peaked yachting cap, and spun my car around in pursuit, laying on the horn. The car ahead turned right toward town, increasing its speed rather than stopping. He was hogging the middle of the road, making it impossible for me to pull alongside or cut him off. Suddenly he swerved to the right, onto South Road. I went past and hit my brakes, losing precious seconds. By the time I was on the road after him the car had disappeared in a cloud of dust.

"He's up ahead," Tober said, stating the obvious. "He knows we've spotted him!"

"I don't know that I can catch him on these roads. I'm no race driver."

"Let me take the wheel. I'll catch him."

"No thanks," I said, visions of my overturned car making me cautious. At the same time, my refusal to let him drive seemed to obligate me to try harder. I knew my car could win on a paved

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highway, and it should do it on a dirt road as well. Finally we caught up with the cloud of dust and I knew I was close—so close that I seemed to drive right through him. The dust cleared and he was nowhere in sight!

"He turned off somewhere," Tober shouted.

"There's not even a driveway on this stretch."

But I was wrong, of course. I'd forgotten the little weed-grown path to the ruins of Sy Holden's barn. I'd passed the spot in the cloud of dust without even realizing it. Backing up now, I spotted the car parked behind some bushes. "Hang on!" I told him, barreling through the weeds.

"There he is!" Tober pointed, and I saw the man in the cap leave the car and run into a field of corn.

We were both out of the car and after him in an instant. We seemed to know it was our last best hope of solving the mystery. But August corn is high in this part of the state, and the summer weather had encouraged its growth. The man in the cap had vanished in a maze of corn stalks. We searched for twenty minutes before admitting we'd lost him.

I'd been careful to prevent him from circling around to his car, but apparently he'd made no attempt at that. The dark green roadster had a rumble seat which I discovered was unlocked. I pulled it open and looked inside, but there was only a large black cloth and a hand-painted sign which read Private Party—Closed to the Public.

"Anything there?" Jack Tober asked.

"Not much, but maybe it's enough."

I dropped Tober off at his farm and drove back into town, heading directly for the sheriff's office. He seemed pleased to see me. "You got anything on the Tober case?"

"I might have. Let's look at your map of the county."

"What's a map gonna tell us, Doc?"

"We'll see." I went to the wall behind his desk and studied the roads I'd been driving on all day. It was a large-scale map and Sheriff Lens, with industrious foresight, had at some past time marked off the various farms with colored pencils. I traced my finger over the properties, trying to imagine each one.

"What are you after?" he asked.

"Sy Holden had a barn fire early this morning."

"Hobos have been sleeping there. I chased some out a couple of weeks back."

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"Sy's farmhouse and main barn are on the highway, but the farm runs all the way through to South Road. That's where he had the extra barn that burned."

"All those farms run through. See, Tober's place goes all the way through to North Road. This is all his property, except for this green rectangle where Aunt Peachy has her big fruit stand."

"Did you ever think of that fruit stand as a roadhouse, Sheriff?"

"What? That's crazy, Doc. Tober told us they had a neon sign, and there was music and voices coming from inside. And six or eight cars in the lot. The stand is big, but not that big."

"Let's take a ride out there and see. Do you have a couple of deputies who could follow in a second car?"

He grinned at me. "You want a show of force, is that it?"

"Something like that."

I left my car at the sheriff's office and went in his car with the deputies following. It was after six when we reached Aunt Peachy's fruit stand. Most of her bins were virtually empty and she was beginning to close down the glass windows along the front of the building. "I just got a few plums and cherries left," she told us. "You should have come earlier."

Sheriff Lens stepped up to her. "We want to ask you a few questions, Aunt Peachy."

"Questions?"

"About the Bund meetings you've been holding here," I said.

I'd thought she would deny it, but she stood up to us and said quite calmly, "This is a free country, isn't it? We're not violating any law in expressing our friendship with Germany."

"Then why keep the meetings such a secret?" I wanted to know. "Why disguise the place to look like a roadhouse, complete with music? I think if we look around under your counters we'll find the neon sign for the Apple Orchard and a phonograph for playing the music Jack Tober heard. Maybe the voices too. All those cars at a fruit stand in the middle of the night would have attracted attention, so on Bund nights the stand was transformed into an ersatz roadhouse."

I strolled into the place as I spoke, and she tried to block my way. "You got a search warrant?"

"I don't need one. I'm not a police officer."

She thought about that, her sharp eyes studying each of us, taking in the other two deputies who'd emerged from their car. "Search all you want," she decided finally. "You won't find anything."

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She was almost right. There was nothing behind the counters but empty boxes and wooden crates. The low building, about thirty feet long and ten feet deep, hardly afforded any other hiding places. There was a closed door at the rear, though, and when I made for that Aunt Peachy squealed with fright. The door opened suddenly and the man we'd pursued earlier, minus his cap, came through it holding a gun. That was when I knew we had them.

"This is my nephew Otto," she said. "He's visiting from New York. Otto, put down that gun."

He hadn't seen the other troopers till then. There were three guns on him in an instant and he decided to follow his aunt's suggestion.

"Now suppose you tell us about killing Lenny Blue," the sheriff said.

We phoned Jack and Becky Tober that evening to tell them what happened, but it wasn't until the following morning that Sheriff Lens and I drove out to their farm to explain in detail. Becky brought coffee and donuts to the kitchen table while we talked about the missing roadhouse.

I showed them the hand-painted sign I'd found in Otto's roadster. "*Private Party*. This was in case some strangers happened by during their meetings. It was enough to make me believe your story—that and the tire tracks on Lenny's body. They showed he wasn't hit by the car but was already lying down when you ran over him. So I started looking for this phantom roadhouse. Holden's barn was an unlikely candidate even before it was burned, probably by hobos. A barn is taller than a two-story house. It could hardly be mistaken for the low building you described."

"What's that black cloth?" Tober asked.

"Since it was in Otto's rumble seat with the party sign, I think it was used to cover up the sign pointing to Turk Hill Road. Covered up like that, you'd easily miss it on a cloudy night. Now there'd be no point in covering the sign if the roadhouse was on South Road or Turk Hill. If you were being lured further along, it had to be beyond Turk Hill, on North Road. What was on North Road? Aunt Peachy's fruit stand, and we'd heard that Aunt Peachy herself supported Franco, as does Hitler. If there was a Bund involved, she could have knowledge of it."

"Why didn't I notice it wasn't my road?"

"You'd been drinking, as you admitted yourself. But in a way you did notice. You said the road seemed narrower every time you drove

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it, and North Road is a bit narrower and rougher than Turk Hill."

Sheriff Lens took over at this point. "Aunt Peachy and Otto haven't made a full statement yet, but it appears that Lenny Blue was acting unstable and threatening to report some of their activities to the police. One day he was a big Hitler backer and the next day he wanted nothing to do with the Bund."

I nodded. "The picture in the drawer."

"Exactly. They lured you two up there by covering over the signpost pointing to your road. You missed the road and took the next one, ending up at the supposed roadhouse. In the dark, with the neon sign temporarily in place and a hidden phonograph furnishing the proper music, you never recognized Aunt Peachy's fruit stand. After all, the front of the stand is usually open when people see it in the summer."

"What did they have to fear from someone like Lenny Blue?" Jack asked. "They weren't violating the law."

"Not yet, but they had plans for the future. The fruit stand could only hold twenty or so people for meetings," the sheriff continued. "They wanted hundreds, thousands. They wanted to hold the biggest German-American Bund rally in the state."

"Amazing," was all that Tober could say.

"Blue was shot to death, probably by Otto, shortly before you arrived. One of his men placed the body under your rear tires while Otto distracted you. They figured when the bullet was found no one would believe your story."

"I should feed the chickens," Becky said, glancing at the clock. "There are always chores for a farm wife."

I smiled and said I'd go with her. "I've never really seen your place."

"There's nothing to see but a few chickens and a lot of apple trees."

She picked up a pail of feed and we strolled out to the backyard while the sheriff continued talking to Jack. "I still can't believe all of this really happened," she said.

"I had trouble believing it too," I told her. We'd reached the henhouse and Becky threw a few handfuls of feed as the chickens came running out for it. "I had trouble believing Otto and Aunt Peachy could ever be sure of luring you up there. And I had trouble believing that Aunt Peachy would miss an important Bund meeting just to attend a Grange dance. She was not only there, but Dave Foster told me you two sat with her."

She stared at me blankly. "Did we?"

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"Becky, you engineered this thing from start to finish, didn't you? It was your idea to frame Jack for Lenny Blue's murder. You've been a member of the Bund from the start."

"That's crazy! I'm his only witness!"

"And when his case came to trial you'd conveniently fail to testify. Since a wife can't be forced to testify against her husband, the jury would draw the conclusion that you were absent because you knew he was guilty."

"Why would I be working with those two? What could I gain?"

"This farm. I was looking at a county map yesterday, seeing how your orchard runs through to North Road where the fruit stand is. With Jack in prison and the farm in your possession, you were going to turn it over to Aunt Peachy and Otto for the giant rally they always wanted. Your orchard would be alive with the songs and chants and speeches of Nazi Germany."

"How do you hope to prove any of this?"

"You were alone with Aunt Peachy for a time at the Grange, working out the details. When you two started home, she phoned Otto at the fruit stand. He took Lenny outside and shot him, then watched for your car. You tried to drive home, to be certain you turned onto North Road. He wouldn't let you, but that was still all right. He missed the covered-over sign, of course, and you simply told him the sign was at the next corner. It couldn't have been, though, because we examined the ground in that area. You simply lied about it. At the roadhouse you told Jack to back up the car, which was when he hit Lenny. You overcame Jack's reluctance to drive Lenny to the hospital. You guided him every step of the way, Becky. None of it could have happened without you. When I studied that map I realized it had something to do with the farm. You were using Aunt Peachy and Otto just as they were using you—each for your own ends. You'd be rid of Jack and they'd have a real home for the Bund at last."

"You actually expect Sheriff Lens to believe this?"

I threw a final handful of feed to the chickens. "He believes it. I told him on the way out here. Now let's go in and see if Jack believes it too."

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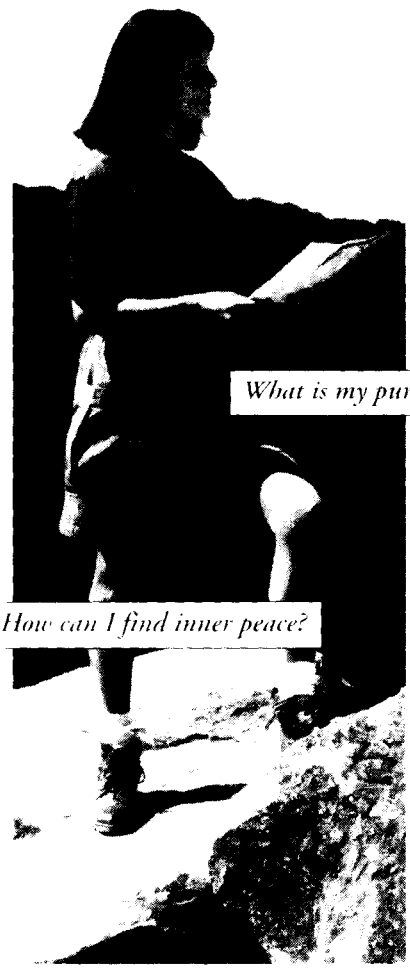
The Answers to Life's Questions are Closer Than You Think



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THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

In a mystery genre that is more diverse than ever, it is possible to achieve excellence from more than one direction. Of this month's top two, one uses standard, familiar elements of the private-eye novel in an unusually expert and enjoyable way, while the other takes the conventions and expectations of the classical English cozy and turns them on their head.

**** John Lutz: *Torch,* Holt, $22. Florida P.I. Fred Carver fits the contemporary shamus pattern in many ways: a strong code of personal ethics and conduct; a world view that wavers between the cynical and the idealistic; a long-term non-marital relationship with a strong, intelligent, loving woman; a sympathetic and helpful police contact; and encounters with less admirable officers of the law. His eighth case begins with a tantalizing situation: after a married woman asks Carver to follow *her* in the course of the extramarital affair, she walks in front of a truck, an apparent suicide, followed by *another* apparent suicide—of her husband. Adding to the standard elements are Carver's several encounters with a diminutive Asian strongarm artist who would be right at home in a James Bond movie. With the prose as sharp as ever and a more complex plot than usual, this is one of Lutz's best. (Versatility note: Lutz is the only writer to contribute to both the recent animal-oriented anthologies, *Canine Crimes* [Jove, $4.50], edited by Cynthia Manson, and *Danger in D.C.: Cat Crimes in the Nation's Capital* [Fine, $20], edited by Martin H. Greenberg and Ed Gorman.)

**** Michael Dibdin: *The Dying of the Light,* Pantheon, $19. Among the most critically acclaimed of contemporary British mystery writers, Dibdin began his career with *The Last Sherlock Holmes Story* (1978), a pastiche that went a step too far for many Baker Street acolytes. In his latest, he combines the broad parody of the classical detective story found in Tom Stoppard's play *The Real Inspector Hound* and some of James Anderson's novels with a harrowing account of the treatment of residents in an English retirement home whose operators have a motive to thin the ranks of guests. Rosemary Travis and Dorothy Davenport make their existence at Eventide Lodge bearable by casting their fellow residents in an imaginary murder mystery, but a real mystery develops, investigated by Stanley Jarvis, a memorable cop who carries in his head all the scores of the obscure and defunct English football club Accrington Stanley for the years 1956 to 1962.

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With its unity of place and variety of interesting characters, this short novel would make a fine play.

*** Jean Hager: *The Redbird's Cry*, Mysterious, $18.95. As an investigator for the Native American Advocacy League, Molly Bearpaw has the kind of semiofficial post that permits her to act like a private eye when lawyer and tribal storyteller Tom Battle dies at a Cherokee cultural exhibit, the apparent victim of a blowgun dart fired by a rebellious teenager. For all her attention to characterization and cultural nuances, Hager concentrates on the central problem like a Golden Age puzzle spinner. Indeed, with the performance aspect of the crime, a comparison to Ngaio Marsh is as apt as the more obvious one to Tony Hillerman. Recommended especially to admirers of contemporary classicists like James Yaffe, Barbara D'Amato, Jane Haddam, and Herbert Resnicow.

*** Paul Harding: *Red Slayer*, Morrow, $20. The second book-length case for fourteenth-century friar Brother Athelstan, which should delight historical mystery fans, is another case where the obvious comparison is not necessarily the most apt one. Concerning murders, all bizarre and some seemingly impossible, among the household and guests of the Tower of London's constable, the story is more in the tradition of John Dickson Carr than Ellis Peters, though the publisher's promotional copy evokes both. While the prose is usually effective and even eloquent, some distracting stylistic quirks should have been corrected in the editing process: some of the characters use anachronistic slang, and too many of them mumble, mutter, and murmur their dialogue.

** Robert Goldsborough: *The Missing Chapter*, Bantam, $19.95. The latest Nero Wolfe pastiche is one of the most enjoyable, partly because of the joke on himself Goldsborough has built into the plot: the murder victim, not at all an attractive figure, is an author who has taken over the Sergeant Barnstable mystery series from its deceased creator. Underlining the implied admonition not to take matters too seriously, Wolfe straight-facedly uses the "Calvin & Hobbes" verb *transmogrify* at one point. Latest of the original Wolfe novels to be reprinted in the Rex Stout Library (Bantam, $4.99 each) are 1939's *Over My Dead Body* and 1946's *The Silent Speaker*, introduced by John Jakes and Walter Mosley respectively.

Mel D. Ames's *The Ogopogo Affair* (Mosaic Press, P.O. Box 1032, Oakville, Ontario L6J 5E9; $9.95 Canadian), a handsome 67-page paperback combination of mystery and tourist souvenir, follows a 1984 *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine* novelet with some photos and nonfiction vignettes regarding Canada's equivalent of the Loch Ness Monster, a legendary creature periodically spotted in Lake Okanagan, British Columbia. While Ames will never be accused of elegant prose, his story is well-

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constructed and presents a notable howdunit problem: a series of deaths of young women apparently crushed to death by the lake monster. The true murder method is an inventive and memorable one.

There is finally an American print edition of Ellis Peters's 1951 novel *Fallen Into the Pit* (Mysterious, $17.95), reviewed here in June 1993 on the basis of its audiotape version. Coincident with their publication of the first Felse family mystery, the same publisher has a paperback reprint of Peters's first Brother Cadfael novel, first published in 1977 and still one of the best in the series, *A Morbid Taste for Bones* ($4.99).

A nonfiction reprint of note is Dick Francis's autobiography *The Sport of Queens* (Armchair Detective Library/Penzler, $20). The book was originally published in 1957, recounting Francis's career as a steeplechase jockey before he became even more famous as an author of crime thrillers. This version, first published in 1982, includes a seventeen-page postscript on his life since then, including some discussion of his writing.

Several volumes of interviews with mystery writers have appeared in recent years, all of them interesting and valuable. Best of the lot by far is Rosemary Herbert's *The Fatal Art of Entertainment* (G.K. Hall, $39.95). Herbert draws some rare personal and professional insights from subjects Julian Symons, Sue Grafton, P.D. James, Tony Hillerman, John Mortimer, Patricia Cornwell, Jonathan Gash, Reginald Hill, Jane Langton, Robert Barnard, Jeremiah Healy, Catherine Aird, and Barbara Neely.

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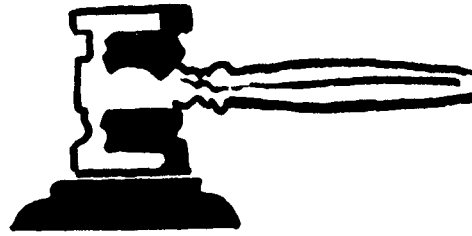

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Nearly all Jo Bannister's stories for us have been spiced with a wicked sense of irony, but she outdoes herself in the following tale of two palaeontologists and their fossil finds . . .

BLOOD FEUD

by JO BANNISTER

"The most remarkable thing about the Department of Palaeontology," said Dr. Oates, taking a stroll round the diplodocus with a young woman on his arm, "is how many of the dinosaurs are still alive."

The girl, whose name was Tracy, looked first at him, then at the denuded ribs of a creature that ate its last meal 150 million years earlier, with growing doubt. "Go on." Like Eliza Doolittle she pronounced it "Garn."

"No, really," insisted Oates, patting her hand. He was a bit of a dandy, a man of around forty who dressed like a man of around thirty and propagated his opinions with the certainty of a very young man of twenty. "You don't often see them during opening hours, of course. Mostly they come out when the museum is shut and they can pursue their ancient rituals without fear of interruption. They're shy, you see, and easily upset by the gawping masses."

Tracy realised it was a joke. The one thing she knew about palaeontology, that *everyone* knew about palaeontology, was that dinosaurs were extinct. But she didn't know Oates well enough to guess what he was leading up to. She watched him sideways with an uneasy little smile and waited.

"Oh my goodness!" Oates exclaimed then, quickening his step. "*Aren't* you a lucky girl. There's one of them now."

Professor Whitby looked up with a weary sigh from his work of scrutinising the specimen's inside hind claw. He had one emerging from a block of Late Jurassic sandstone that was almost but not quite the same, was wondering whether anyone would salute if he ran *Diplodocus whitbii* up the flagpole. Probably not. *Scelidosaurus*

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whitbii had turned out to be only an elderly *Scelidosaurus* with arthritis. And *Parasaurolophus whitbii* . . .

"Hello, Oates," he said without enthusiasm. "Were you looking for me?" He straightened up, a stocky man in his early fifties with iron-grey hair that suffered from his habit of running a distracted hand through it. He wore sports jackets of a cut popular twenty years before, and suede shoes.

"Just showing Tracy here the more important sights of the museum."

Whitby nodded morosely. If he hadn't known Oates, he might have taken it for a compliment; but he did. "I suppose he's told you about my parasaurolophus, has he?"

Tracy couldn't begin to guess whether nice girls asked after a man's parasaurolophus or not. "Er—"

Oates was chuckling, a smug, self-satisfied chuckle that Whitby was not alone in finding offensive. "No; but I will do." His hands sketched an elaborate shape in the air over his head. "*Parasaurolophus* had a hollow bony crest running up the front of its face and extending behind its head. There's been considerable debate as to its purpose: a defensive weapon, a sexual flag,"—he gave the girl a squeeze—"or a sound-box. Weishampel at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore made a model of one that produced a sound like an oboe. When Whitby did something similar with our parasaurolophus it wolf-whistled at the head of Fossil Vertebrates."

"It wolf-whistled," said Whitby in his teeth, "because Oates tinkered with it the night before the presentation. I have never been so embarrassed in my life."

Oates laughed delightedly, the girl at his side forgotten in the pleasure of baiting his old rival. "But my dear chap, you love being embarrassed. You must. Nobody could pick the losing side of so many arguments by chance alone."

His eyes rolled despairingly and Whitby groaned. "Don't start again, Oates. You know we're not going to agree on this one. You think dinosaurs were warm-blooded. Well, that's all right: lots of perfectly sane people believe in ghosts, UFOs, and virgin birth as well. They're entitled to their opinion and you're entitled to yours. Only, don't let's go over it all again."

But Oates considered arguing, and particularly arguing with Whitby, and most especially arguing with Whitby over the circulatory system of dinosaurs, the best fun he could have with his clothes on. He shook his head in a manner designed to appear tolerant when

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it was nothing of the kind. "But how can you look at something like *Deinonychus* and say it was cold-blooded? The whole damned animal was designed for speed: for chasing down its prey, leaping onto it, and carving it up with that big hind claw. Everything about it—the bone structure, the musculature, its hunting pattern—says it was the cheetah of its time. A cold-blooded cheetah wouldn't work, so Deinonychus was warm-blooded. QED."

Though he knew it was a mistake, Whitby couldn't stop himself rising to the bait. "That's a gross oversimplification and you know it. Yes, *Deinonychus* was obviously capable of energy-intensive predation." Seeing the glassy expression in Tracy's eye, he explained. "Running after a much larger prey, jumping on it, holding on, and hacking it to death uses up a lot of energy. The argument goes that cold-blooded animals, which rely on the sun for their body temperature, couldn't produce energy at the necessary rate.

"The other argument," he went on, fixing Oates with a steely eye, "is that crocodiles do a pretty good job of being a cold-blooded predator. The advantage of cold-bloodedness is that one meal lasts you a whole lot longer if you don't have to run your central heating with it as well. There's no problem with a cold-blooded killer if he only has to produce these great bursts of energy once every couple of weeks. There's all the time in the world for him to sit in the sun, building up his reserves between hunts."

"And tall dinosaurs? Did sitting in the sun let them figure out a way of getting blood to their brain, anything up to forty feet above the ground, without the pressure required exploding the delicate blood vessels of their lungs? Warm-blooded animals," he informed Tracy, "run two circulatory systems from a divided heart, making an upright stance possible. There are no large upright reptiles."

"But alligators have a divided heart that could run parallel blood circuits," countered Whitby. "Nobody claims that makes them warm-blooded."

"Look at the damn bones," snapped Oates, beginning to lose his temper. "We know that at least some dinosaurs had bone growth patterns directly comparable with modern warm-blooded animals."

"We also know," retorted Whitby, "that some dinosaurs produced reptilian-type growth rings in their bones."

"What about the sauropods? Bodies that big would never have warmed up from sunshine alone."

"What *about* the sauropods?" snapped Whitby. "They consumed tons of vegetation a day. In a universally warm climate, with your

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guts fermenting like a brewery, your problem wouldn't be getting warm, it would be keeping cool. The last thing that sauropods needed was to boost their body temperature by means of their food intake."

"The proportions of meat-eaters to prey animals approximate to the proportions among modern warm-blooded animals. If they were cold-blooded and only ate occasionally there'd be more carnosaurs."

"We haven't enough specimens even to *guess* what the proportions of the different species were. For heaven's sake, we haven't found a dozen tyrannosaurs in a century and a half! How can you extrapolate from that?"

"But what about . . . ?"

"Then how do you explain . . . ?"

Tracy said, "Is that how you can tell how old they were?"

The men stopped arguing and looked at her blankly. "Sorry?"

"Growth rings in their bones," she said. "Like trees."

Oates blinked. "Yeah. You saw their legs off and count."

They'd rehearsed this argument so often they could have picked it up again at any point. Indeed, either of them could have held it on his own, playing both parts by turns. But the interruption seemed to signal the end of it, at least for today. Oates changed the subject.

"How's the book coming?"

Whitby brightened perceptibly. "Would you believe it's finished? After seven and a half years. I'm going over it now, bringing it up to date, but the real work's done. It'll be with the publisher by Christmas."

Oates whistled. "Seven and a half years' work. And all based on a mistaken premise."

Whitby laughed out loud. "Oates, old chap, I've nothing against warm-blooded dinosaurs. Produce the evidence and I'll gladly revise my opinions. But in the state of current knowledge, the balance of probabilities is that dinosaurs were cold-blooded, just like modern lizards. That's what I've said in my book, that's what I'm sticking with. Find me a dinosaur in an overcoat and I'll think again, but in the meantime I see no problems with the traditional model of an animal that was cold-blooded, albeit with certain physiological modifications to deal with particular problems."

"Big book, is it?"

Whitby replied by spreading his hands like an angler.

"I read a book once," said Tracy.

* * *

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No one ever saw the two men arguing again. Both of them were busy—Whitby on his book, Oates on some project of his own—and when they did meet there was a kind of truce between them, a circumspection that allowed them to take elevenses in the canteen together without spraying each other with scorn and biscuit crumbs. A week passed without incident.

Then one morning the cleaners arrived to find the body of Dr. Oates sprawled across the tail of the diplodocus, a great wound in his forehead as if he'd been shot with a small artillery piece.

Detective Superintendent Pickford ordered a search of the building for clues as to the murder weapon, the identity of the killer, and a motive for the brutal slaying of a palaeontologist. The task proved easier than he had imagined: all three were found together in a small office beneath the canteen.

The superintendent, unable to make sense of what Professor Whitby was saying, called in the head of Fossil Vertebrates to translate.

Dr. Ferguson understood what had happened only too well. She had, of course, known both men, the solemn plodding Professor Whitby and the volatile, unreliable Dr. Oates. She remembered *Parasaurolophus whitbii*.

Professor Whitby sat at his desk. On it lay two fossils: a slab of limestone and an iguanodon hand. Beside it was a large metal wastepaper bin full of ash. The prominent thumb-spike of the iguanodon was covered in blood and something nasty, sticky, and grey.

Dr. Ferguson explained. "Professor Whitby has been writing a book for the last seven and a half years, a scholarly work combining original material with a comprehensive summary of the science to date. As a traditionalist, he took the position that dinosaurs were cold-blooded."

"And Dr. Oates thought they were warm-blooded," said Superintendent Pickford, still not understanding. "You're not telling me they came to blows over it and one of them ended up dead?"

Dr. Ferguson indicated the limestone slab. "What can you see?"

Even with his glasses on Superintendent Pickford couldn't see much. "Bones, is it?"

"It is." With her pen she outlined a slightly curved structure like a very large stiff finger. "It's the last nine inches of a deinonychus tail. *Deinonychus*," she said, as if reminding him of something he already knew, "was a swift hunting dinosaur of the Lower Cretaceous." Again she pointed with the pen. "What do you make of that?"

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The policeman peered from a range of inches but saw nothing that made any sense to him. "Scratches in the rock?"

"Those, Superintendent, are the fossil remains of feathers."

He felt sure he was missing something significant. "Wasn't it supposed to fly?"

Dr. Ferguson smiled tersely, pushing a wing of dark hair off her brow. "It was a dinosaur, Superintendent, none of them flew. But the purpose of feathers isn't flight, it's insulation. Today feathers are worn by birds that fly and those that don't; but they're all warm-blooded. They need insulation to conserve body heat. Cold-blooded creatures have bare skin to absorb sunshine."

"So Dr. Oates was right. And in a fit of temper Professor Whitby brained him with—what the hell is that thing?"

"The thumb-spike of an iguanodon," Dr. Ferguson said quietly. "And yes, that is what happened. But it isn't why."

"Then—?" Superintendent Pickford spread a helpless hand.

Whitby took up the story. He was very pale and his voice shook: when he tapped the limestone in front of him his fingernail chattered on the rock. "I found this yesterday in a batch of samples from the States. It hadn't been prepared, it looked as if it had just been hacked out of the rock, bundled up, and shipped off. I thought I was probably the first person to look at it closely, to ask myself what those striations were.

"As you see, they look like something and nothing. A rather casual excavator could chip the thing out, think, 'Another deinonychus tail, huh?—where can I sell this?', and parcel it up without ever really examining it. It was only when I got it under the microscope that I realised those little scratches in the surrounding rock were associated with the specimen itself.

"Superintendent, it's impossible to exaggerate the importance of such a discovery. Warm-bloodedness is *the* topic currently exercising palaeontology: a specimen deciding the issue would be beyond price. A feathered dinosaur—*Archaeopteryx* is not, of course, a dinosaur but the earliest known bird—would be the find of the century. And I had one. *Deinonychus whitbii.*"

Professor Whitby ran his hand through the iron-grey hair. "I also had seven and a half years' worth of manuscript arguing that dinosaurs were cold-blooded. I set out the case for warm-bloodedness but came down firmly on the side of the sunbathers. You could say I staked my reputation on it.

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"I thought I could do a rewrite, taking out my earlier conclusions and substituting new ones. But the more I read the manuscript, the more ludicrous it seemed. You can't deal with a discovery like this by rewording a few paragraphs. It was the pinnacle of my life's work, and if it put the skids under some earlier work, so be it. I wasn't going to compromise: I had the most important fossil of my generation, *that* was the book I had to write. Nothing I'd written before was worth the paper it was scribbled on."

He smiled ruefully at Dr. Ferguson. "So I burned it. Seven and a half years' work—I lit a fire in my bin and dropped the pages in one by one. And I whistled as I did it. I was happy to see it go: it was all a mistake; if my fossil had turned up six months later I'd never have lived it down. I burned it with all the zealous joy of an inquisitor burning heretics. It was midnight before I finished."

Whitby's eyes strayed back to the limestone slab and the frail smile faded from his lips. "And then—he came by. Dr. Oates. Said he was just passing, wondered if I'd found anything interesting among the new fossils. So I showed him. I knew he'd be jealous as hell. He'd have *killed* to have discovered the thing himself: the feathered dinosaur that proved he was right all along."

"But he didn't kill, did he?" said Superintendent Pickford. "You killed him. Why?"

Whitby folded his hands in front of him. They were still shaking slightly. "All the time I was telling him, I was watching for a reaction. When I showed him the fossil I wasn't looking at the specimen, I was looking at him. For what seemed like forever there was nothing: no excitement, no bitterness, no jealousy, no triumph. He studied the fossil and made no comment.

"Then I saw his expression begin to change. I couldn't believe it. He was smiling. Then he was chuckling. Then the bloody man was laughing in my face. I asked him to explain; he either couldn't or wouldn't, he just kept pointing at the specimen. So I put it under the microscope again.

"And in a corner of the slab—there," he pointed, "that dark spot that I'd thought was a natural variation in the rock—I found a set of tiny initials. GDO: Gerard Delany Oates. He'd carved them there with an air-powered engraver. The same tool he'd used to etch the outline of the supposed feathers.

"It must have taken him days. He'd taken an unremarkable fossil, doctored it, signed it, then hidden it among the fossils from Montana and waited for me to find it.

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"He was laughing so much the tears were running down his face. I told him about my book, showed him the ashes. He laughed so hard I thought he'd have a stroke.

"I think I went a little mad then. I picked up the nearest heavy implement and swung at him. He stopped laughing; in fact he fell off his chair. I swung at him again and he ran. I chased him halfway round the museum before I finally caught up with him on the stairs. We were both out of breath; when he turned to remonstrate I hit him between the eyes with the iguanodon's hand."

Because it was a good specimen, the iguanodon fossil was eventually cleaned up and put on display. But the adulterated deinonychus tail was labeled as a fraud, put in a box, and stored in the farthest corner of the deepest basement. Dr. Ferguson was also a palaeontologist, she couldn't bring herself to destroy anything; this was the best she could do.

Professor Whitby went to prison, where he quickly settled in, taking over the running of the library and later adding a small collection of historical artifacts.

Shock at the ghastly deed swept the museum. For days no one could speak of anything else; and months later any conversation was likely to return to the same subject at any time. How could *anyone* do such a thing? They all knew, of course, how Professor Whitby and Dr. Oates had felt about one another—some of them had been there when the parasaurolophus produced its improbable wolf-whistle. Unlike the police, they recognised that these were important matters, things that could start a feud between intelligent men.

But even in love, war, and palaeontology, where most things are acceptable, there are lines which decent people do not cross. There was an element of understanding, but no forgiveness. It was a monstrous act, a crime beyond absolution. It would be years before anyone at the museum would speak the perpetrator's name without odium.

How could *anyone* fake a fossil?

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a *NEW* short story by

DONALD OLSON

Something we at EQMM *have never been able to explain is why certain themes appear periodically and then disappear from our submissions. We've had a rash of stories dealing with retirement in recent months, in explanation of which we can only speculate that the fact that America's population is ageing has somehow taken hold of the criminous imagination. Whatever the subject, however, Donald Olson is able to give it his own distinctive spin . . .*

CLUBBED TO DEATH

by DONALD OLSON

When Royden Smith retired after forty years with the Gresham Board of Public Utilities, his sole ambition was to buy a modest camper-trailer and do a bit of traveling, see something of the country before he and his wife May were too old to stir from home. It was a very pleasant home in that section of town known as the Glade, not so pretentious as Pleasantview Heights, but with its own unique woodsy charm.

As May had always shared Royden's dream of traveling, or certainly had given him the impression of doing so, he was unprepared for the damper she cast on the camper idea, even more vigorous a damper than she'd cast on his early retirement with its consequent reduction in pension benefits.

"Time enough for all that gallivanting," May declared, assuming her most imperious expression. "We must tighten our belts, not expand our horizons." Liking the sound of this, she smiled like a politician expecting applause.

Royden didn't applaud, neither did he argue, having learned long ago that arguing with May was a pointless exercise in frustration.

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Instead he proposed a compromise: they could take a bus tour to Williamsburg, the first of many national historic sites he'd looked forward to visiting.

"Forget that," said May. "I'm entertaining the Garden and Tree ladies on the second. We'll be making final plans for the house and garden tour. Which reminds me, I want you to get started on my English garden before it's too late."

"I don't know the first thing about English gardens," Royden protested. He enjoyed puttering about outside, but planning an English garden lay well beyond his scope.

"You can learn, can't you? That's what libraries are for."

The Garden and Tree Club was only one of May's enthusiasms, but until he retired Royden had had only a vague awareness of just how active a clubwoman May had become.

"Now you must make yourself scarce this afternoon," May informed him. "I'm having the Mozart Club for lunch and study. Poor Betty. You should have seen her face when I was elected president. She'd set her heart on it."

"What am I supposed to do?" Royden quibbled.

"Be *resourceful,* dear. You're retired, remember? You can do whatever you want. Go to the library and read up on English gardens. There's nothing more annoying than having husbands popping in and out when a meeting's in progress."

Royden soon discovered the extent of his wife's club activities, which clearly she had no intention of curtailing to satisfy his whims. Every day she seemed to be off to one or another meeting. There was the Quilters, the Newcomers Club, the Fortnightly, the Garden and Tree, the Mozart Club, the Dorcas Circle, the Browning Society, to name but a few. That May had kept herself busy during his working years had pleased Royden, but he'd assumed that once he'd retired she would be devoting her time to sharing his pleasures and pursuits. Such was plainly not to be the case.

What astonished him was the amount of political infighting in these organizations, the subtle conspiracies, the constant jockeying for position. To see her name in the Club Activities column of the *Register* seemed to bring May inordinate satisfaction, and until now Royden had been unaware of the intense rivalry between May and her neighbor Betty Fairbaugh; each aspired to be the Guiding Force in their various clubs.

"Can you imagine?" May exploded one afternoon when she arrived home from a meeting of the Browning Society. "We all know how

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pushy Betty is, but we had an *agreement,* for heaven's sake. And she betrayed me. I'd promised to back her for president of the Fortnightly if she did the same for me at the Browning. The woman's totally devoid of scruples."

"You could resign," Royden meekly suggested.

"Re*sign?* Are you mad? I should give her the satisfaction?"

"But what about Williamsburg?"

May stared at him as if he'd uttered the most unfathomable of non sequiturs. "Williamsburg?"

"We have to book for the tour before the seats are all taken."

"Royden, weren't you *listening?* How can I go traipsing off to Williamsburg when I've got my plate full with all this planning for the house and garden tour? Be reasonable."

"I'm trying, dear, but every time I suggest we do something together there's always one of these infernal club meetings to interfere."

"You should have thought of that before you took early retirement. You must find things to occupy your time. You know Henry Fairbaugh offered to sponsor you for the Rod and Gun."

"I'm not the least bit interested in rods or guns."

"Silly, it's a *social* club, you don't have to shoot or fish."

"I'm not a joiner. I've never been, you know that."

"Well, you can't simply vegetate. I won't let you."

Royden could imagine nothing more fruitful to the spirit than vegetating in peace, unless it might be traveling about the country visiting historic sites, neither of which pleasures was evidently to be allowed. Early retirement was fast losing its appeal.

Thursday-night bridge with the Fairbaughs had been a ritual for years. Royden found it a relaxing diversion, he and Henry being companionable if not intimate friends. Until now he'd remained oblivious of the immoderate bickering over club matters that May and Betty engaged in over the bridge table.

"Did you know," said Betty, pondering her cards, "that Mrs. Lionel Asperson has agreed to open Bellwood for the first time to the house and garden tour?"

Mrs. Lionel Asperson was the town's richest woman, widow of a department store magnate; May wondered aloud how she had come to make so magnanimous a gesture.

"Little me talked her into it," said Betty with the merest trace of a simper. "What's more, she's all but agreed to join the Garden and Tree."

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May lifted her great prow of a nose. "How on earth did you manage that?"

"Well, never mind how I found out, but it seems her gardener's run off with the maid. I suggested she might wish to employ the services of our Pedro. She jumped at the chance."

May winced at the "our Pedro." Pedro Martinez worked part time for a number of Gresham families, not exclusively and not very frequently for the Fairbaughs.

"I dare say," boasted Betty, "that when the club girls learn how I pulled off that little coup there'll be no contest when it comes to choosing our next president."

May simmered beneath her most august smile, decided it best to change the subject. "Did I tell you that Royden is putting in an English garden?"

"How quaint," Betty murmured. "So lucky your having Royden at your beck and call now he's retired. Without Pedro our garden would be a shambles."

Henry winked at Royden. "See why I'm not eager to retire?"

Royden looked glum. "I thought *we* were going to travel when I quit work."

May laughed. "All he does is sputter about seeing the country. Join the Rotary Club, I tell him. They put on some very interesting travelogues."

"Travelogues are not at all the same thing," said Royden crossly. "We can save them for our old age."

"Mrs. Lionel Asperson just returned from a trip to Egypt," said Betty.

"Rich widows like her can afford to travel," Henry replied.

"Which reminds me," said Betty in a confidential tone, "Mrs. Asperson told me she's been asked to form a local chapter of the W.C.A."

"What's that?" asked Royden. "Anything like the S.P.C.A.?"

"Hardly," May replied. "It's a club. Very exclusive. I'm afraid neither Betty nor I are eligible," she added with a sigh.

"Not yet, anyway," said Betty with a coy glance at May. "Unless we were to *pull a few strings,* if you know what I mean." Titter, titter.

May looked blank for a moment, then giggled. "You're very naughty, shame on you."

At the end of the evening May had to admit that Betty had scored a few points. "I tell you, Royden, that woman won't rest until she's

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president of every club in town. And talk about coups. Wait till she learns I've roped in one of the country's foremost poets to read for us at the G.L.S. in August."

The Gresham Literary Society was one of May's particular favorites; she was a charter member and its acknowledged Guiding Force.

Royden scowled. "You know very well we talked about Mount Rushmore in August."

"*You* talked about Mount Rushmore. And Williamsburg, and Gettysburg, and Stone Mountain, and the Great Smokies. Have I missed anything? Gracious me, you'd have us turning into gypsies in our golden years."

"But hang it all, May, why else do you think I took an early retirement? To travel was our dream."

May regarded him with a smile of patient fortitude. "Your dream, dear. Of course I had to humor your whims. That's what wives are for."

Like a child betrayed out of a trip to the circus, Royden looked around as if for a favorite toy to smash, but he was too accustomed to containing his anger to do more than mutter his displeasure.

The following day Royden took himself off to the public library, solved with a little help the mysteries of the Dewey decimal system, and climbed to the upper tier, where he found to his dismay shelf upon shelf of books on gardens and gardening, flowers and plants. So many! How was he to find one that would tell him what he had to know about planting an English garden? Browsing the shelves he did find British books by a Beverley Nichols and a V. Sackville-West about English gardens, but they were less than instructive.

He was about to give up—let May plant her own English garden if she was so hot on the idea—when his weary eyes fell upon a fat little tome with the intriguing title, *Poisonous Plants*. Wanting something to wile away an hour or so, Royden carried the book to a small desk in an alcove and sat down to read.

He'd had no idea there was such a variety of poisonous plants, and how deceptively pretty they looked in the colored plates: nux vomica, water hemlock, black nightshade, monkshood, henbane, death camass, belladonna, foxglove. So exotic-sounding, yet many of them apparently could be found growing among the commoner wildflowers in rural areas.

* * *

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"That's no way to research a subject," complained May when Royden reported his failure to acquire any useful information on English gardens. "You don't just paw blindly through the shelves. What do you think reference librarians are there for? Time is wasting, you can't muddle about. You must go back tomorrow and ask for assistance."

"I'll do that," he said musingly, with a secret smile. "I'll go back tomorrow."

"And goodness knows you'll find all manner of books on travel. No need to go careering around in a camper. Let your mind do the traveling. Use your imagination."

Which was precisely what Royden had begun to do.

The following day, a day Royden had spent not only in the library but in rambling about the woods and fields around Gresham, May arrived home from the Garden and Tree in a mood of extreme irritation.

"Can you believe it? Betty Fairbaugh actually *promised* that Mrs. Lionel Asperson would open her home to the house and garden tour if the club would agree to make Betty chairperson of the event. And they *did*."

"So what's wrong with that?" Royden asked.

"My dear man, Betty Fairbaugh has no more organizational talent than a snail. This is *the* event of the summer. Oh, I tell you if I could think of a way to put that woman's nose out of joint, I'd do it. I'm in a very bad mood, so don't you dare tell me you wasted another day at the library without learning anything about English gardens."

"No, dear, I didn't waste my time at all."

"And?"

"The librarians were very helpful."

"Well that's more like it. My English garden *must* be planted in time for the house and garden tour."

With the help of Pedro, a fair amount of progress was made on the project, although Royden felt sure the garden's resemblance to an *English* garden would be purely literary, not that May was likely to know the difference.

"Well, I've kept my end of the bargain," said Royden once the plantings had been finished. "I expect you to keep yours, May."

"Bargain? What bargain?"

"As soon as this famous house and garden tour is history, you and I are going to buy that camper and head for the Great Smokies. After Williamsburg."

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May snorted, most unbecomingly. "What absolute nonsense. Bargain, indeed. You must be dreaming. I shall be far too busy this fall to do any traveling."

Royden drew himself up. "Would you rather I went by myself?"

"Are you out of your mind? I never heard of anything so preposterous. What would people say?"

Royden smiled broadly. "I've retired from caring what people say."

"You're just trying to get my goat."

"I'm trying to get your attention. Something I haven't been able to do since the day I retired."

"You're being impossible," she snapped.

"No, dear, I'm being serious."

"I don't like being threatened, Royden. I don't like it one little bit."

Royden turned his back and headed for the kitchen. The library, he'd told May, had inspired him with an interest in the culinary arts as a hobby. Not the sort of hobby May would have chosen for him, although she had to admit the omelets Royden had cooked for them in the past few days hadn't been all that bad.

The accident happened a couple of nights later. Royden was in the living room reading the newspaper when suddenly the lights went out.

May came scurrying out of the kitchen. "I've done it again, dear. I know you told me I shouldn't plug the mixer into that bad outlet but I forgot. A fuse has blown. You'll have to go down cellar and replace it."

Royden muttered under his breath as he fumbled in a kitchen drawer for the flashlight. It wasn't there. May claimed not to have seen it. "You can find your way to the fusebox without a flashlight," she told him.

Royden crossed the dark room to the cellar door. The stairs were treacherously steep and he felt for the handrail screwed into the wall. Two things happened at once. His foot seemed to catch on something and the rail came loose in his hand. Losing his balance, he plunged down into the darkness.

"You were lucky, old boy," said Henry Fairbaugh when it was discovered Royden had suffered no more than a cracked rib. "The way May was carrying on when she came screaming to the door, I

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thought I'd find you dead on the cellar floor. Bit careless, weren't you?"

"I tripped over something. It caught on my instep. I felt it just before I fell."

Henry shook his head. "I didn't see anything. Maybe it was your shoelace. You know what they say about most accidents happening in the home."

To anyone who didn't know May well, her reaction to the accident might have seemed to be somewhat perfunctory. Royden expected no more. In fact, he was sure Henry's remark about May rushing to his door screaming for help must have been exaggerated; he couldn't imagine anything causing May to lose control of her emotions.

"I'm afraid you'll have to forget about your plans, imaginary or otherwise," she said, "to travel off into the sunset of the Smokies."

"I only cracked a rib, not a hip."

"If you must have a hobby you'd better stick to cooking, it's much less expensive."

Royden, assembling the ingredients for a green salad, nodded agreement. "You're right as always, my dear. Besides, every man should know how to cook in case the day comes when he has to look after himself."

Like many casual observations, it was only in retrospect that Royden's remark acquired a portentous significance. Preparing for bed a few nights later, May, who had been complaining of a nagging abdominal disorder, became deathly ill. Royden summoned dear old Dr. Chumley, who was all but in his dotage, yet still practicing. Regrettably, nothing could be done. May passed away shortly after midnight.

Acute gastritis was noted as the cause of death when Dr. Chumley signed the certificate.

As he paid farewell visits to all their friends, Royden felt for the first time in his memory that sense of unfettered freedom that follows the perilous escape from a confinement seemingly doomed to last forever. In Henry Fairbaugh's eyes he detected a wistful envy as he described the camper he was picking up in the morning before taking off for Williamsburg and points south.

Betty Fairbaugh squeezed out a mournful tear. "How us girls will miss May's forceful presence. There wasn't a club in town she didn't belong to, except of course the W.C.A."

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"I remember you mentioned that one," said Royden. "You said May wasn't eligible?"

"Nor ever will be, poor dear. W.C.A. stands for the Widows Clubs of America. Mrs. Lionel Asperson has just formed the local chapter."

Royden drove away in a reflective mood, nagged by certain thoughts about May that left him vaguely ashamed. Her club memberships meant the world to May, and she did say she'd do anything to put Betty Fairbaugh's nose out of joint, but even she wouldn't go that far to make herself eligible for a club Betty couldn't join. What was that quip Betty had made when the W.C.A. was first mentioned at the bridge table, about her and Betty being excluded? *Unless we were to pull a few strings?*

Like maybe stretching a length of twine across a cellar step?

Oh, wicked, wicked thought; but it was funny what crazy ideas could pop into a man's head.

Royden decided to stop at the library and read more about Williamsburg. How true it was, a person could glean much useful information about so many subjects at the library. About gardening, for instance, and cooking, and of course botany.

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POSTHUMOUS

by JOYCE CAROL OATES

This is the way it was, or will be.

In the distance as if emerging from the horizon as the earth rotates to dawn, a spiky-notched hammering, pounding. You imagine it in a building miles away, a building populated by strangers. But then it is closer. By leaps, by blocks, closer. And on the avenue twelve floors below your window there is an emergency siren. In fact two sirens, coils of sound like mad red ribbons, rushing and twining together from opposite directions: north, south. It's a familiar panic—*Is the alarm a fire? A fire in our building?*

The hammering noise, the pounding of men's fists, grows louder by quick degrees. There can be no mistaking it now: and the rude rattling of the doorknob: they are at the front door of your apartment. Voices, male voices. Heavy, booted steps. "Hello? Is anyone in there? This is the police, please open the door." A matter-of-fact declaration. Yet it fills you with terror. Lying in bed, you believe it is your bed, unless, so strangely, it is the floor, floorboards pressing through the carpet hard and solid seeming to push upward against your back, buttocks, tender naked heels. You are only partly clothed and very cold. Why are you so cold, you can't comprehend, the light woolen blanket wrapped tightly about you as in a child's urgent embrace but your legs are exposed, calves, ankles, feet. So exposed, the soles of your feet. *Why are you here? Go away! No one has called the police!* You try to sit up but can't, nor even push yourself up from your reclining position onto an elbow. Your legs seem twisted beneath you as if you've fallen from a great height. Your body is limp, paralyzed, as if every nerve, muscle, joint has been severed.

"Open this door, please!"—and another, deeper voice, "Police! Open up!" You hear the unmistakable sound of a door being forced, broken inward, *Go away! Leave me alone! You have no right!* Though your eyes are fixed stark and staring at the ceiling indistinct in shadows above you you can see the straining doorframe, the flying splinters. This is impossible, this cannot be happening, yet it is happening, and where can you hide? Crawl beneath the bed, when you can't move? Crawl into the bathroom, on the farther side of the room? The thin blanket is inadequate to protect you, there is something shameful in your near-nakedness, *Please leave me alone, please go away, we don't need you!*

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Where is your husband, why hasn't he awakened?— or is he away, has he gone and left you alone and how long have you been alone waiting for his return? Married thirty years, and you can't recall his face! But no one will know.

The policemen pay not the slightest heed to your protests. There is a stamping and a crashing in the foyer of the apartment and the very floor shakes. A two-way radio emits a squawk like a parrot's, a blinding light is switched on overhead. You try to wrap yourself tighter in the blanket. *Leave me alone, how dare you,* you are sobbing, pleading, *don't look at me, go away!* In the bedroom doorway are strangers' faces, fleshy blurred faces and rude staring eyes. One of them is young, with glinting wire-rimmed spectacles that reflect the glaring overhead light. *No no no don't look at me!*

You are desperate to hide in the blanket but there is something congealed in it, sticking to your hair. And you are so cold you can't move skin the sickly color of curdled milk, fingernails and toenails bruised from within as plums. So ashamed, so exposed, what right have these strangers in their uniforms to break into your apartment into your privacy into your thirty years' marriage into your soul now approaching you slowly, long trousered legs, gleaming leather belts, metallic studs, buckles, pistols drawn. Three uniformed men unknown to you staring down at you with expressions of a kind you have never seen before. "Je-sus God!" one of them says, whistling thinly. Another says, swallowing, "What *is* it? Is—?" The third says grimly yet with an air of satisfaction, "Huh! You know what that is."

Through the rainspecked window a dark blue phosphorescent sky shot with veins of orange like something rotting.

Don't touch me, don't lift this blanket, go away, I am all right, I am myself. I will always be myself, I am only sleeping and you are my nightmare, apart from me you don't exist, don't touch me!

Two of them are squatting close by you, staring. A long moment of silence. One wipes his mouth on the edge of his hand, the other is speaking in that brusque matter-of-fact voice over the two-way radio. In the doorway of the white-tiled bathroom light bounces off the eyeglasses of the youngest policeman. It's a laugh, or a nervous clearing of his throat. Saying, If you think that's bad, take a look in here.

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a *NEW* short story by

MICHAEL Z. LEWIN

For the second year in a row, Michael Lewin has coedited the original short story collection of the British Crime Writers Association, an enormous undertaking for someone who also has a new novel just out. Mr. Lewin tells us that his work on the story anthology has revitalized his own interest in the short form, with the result that in 1993 he completed more than a dozen new short tales, of which this is one . . .

BLOOD BLUE

by MICHAEL Z. LEWIN

The call did not come in the middle of the night like the others. It was late morning, just after *Woman's Hour*. Judith was not in the least prepared for it.

"Hello?" she said, standing by the telephone with half a cup of coffee in her free hand, smiling, residue of the *Woman's Hour* serial, which was funny, perceptive, clever.

At the other end of the line there was hesitation. Life would have worked out differently had Judith hung up then.

"Hello?" she said again.

An intake of breath. "I seen you," he said. The voice was rough, wheezy. It conjured phlegm and rashes. "You had these blue knickers. Blood-blue knickers, like the veins in your arm. She used to wear knickers that colour, but now it's you. She's dead, and now it's you. Skimpy little blood-blue—"

Judith hung up.

She stood, frozen to her core. Motionless, bar her right hand, which dropped gradually to her side. What was left of the coffee drained onto her skirt, her ankle, and into her slipper.

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Judith stood in her coffee for minutes. Then she began to shake.

It was six hours before Judith called the police. She left the house and walked to the end of the road, where she turned down Green Lane toward the high street. She did not use the direct route through the park.

Outside the Hermitage Lane Post Office there was a card phone. Judith bought a phone card from Mrs. Chandarana in the newsagents and then she followed the instructions mounted in the telephone box.

Judith was waiting at home when the doorbell rang about an hour later. A man who said he was DC Howard from Norbury held up a warrant card and introduced the woman beside him, WPC Menefy. Menefy looked bored, but Howard spoke gently and said there had been many reports of obscene telephone calls on their patch lately and that he was part of a team making a special effort to stop them. He asked to come in.

Judith led them both to the sitting room that overlooked the Chase. She and DC Howard sat. WPC Menefy stood by the bay window.

"How many calls from this man have you had now, Ms. Judd?" DC Howard asked.

"One."

"Is that one before today's?"

"No. I only had the one today," Judith said.

"But before today's call?"

"Hundreds," Judith said.

WPC Menefy turned from the street as DC Howard said, "Hundreds? And you only called us this afternoon?"

"Us?" Judith said.

Menefy sought to trade glances with Howard but the DC concentrated on Judith, who continued, "Oh. Yes, I only called you today."

"What was so unusual about the call today?" WPC Menefy asked.

"Unusual? Nothing."

"So why—" Menefy began, but Howard interrupted. He said, "How long has it been since the last call, Ms. Judd?"

Judith considered, wanting to be accurate but having trouble locating the events she had managed not to think about so long. Finally she said, "About five years."

Menefy turned back to the window. Howard said, "Five years?"

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"Yes."

"I'm afraid I don't understand, Ms. Judd."

"What don't you understand?"

"You rang the police because you received a disturbing telephone call, right?"

"That's right," Judith said.

"But do I gather the call was not part of a pattern of disturbing calls?"

"It's the first one here," Judith said.

"Here?" DC Howard said. "By here, you mean . . . ?"

"In this house."

"So the previous call was—"

"Not 'call,' " Judith corrected sharply. "Calls."

"Calls. Excuse me. But am I right that when you received them you lived elsewhere?"

"In Portland Road."

"I'm sorry, I don't know where that is."

"Kensington."

"Thank you. And there were a lot of disturbing calls, five years ago?"

"Yes," Judith said. "Hundreds." And then, despite her best efforts, she began to shake.

It was humiliating not, after all, to be able to control her body. When she could tell she was in for an extended bout, she explained to the puzzled police officers that she would need to postpone the rest of their talk to another time.

WPC Menefy looked at her watch and was obviously relieved. DC Howard promised to come back tomorrow. They saw themselves out.

Judith remained in the sitting room, out of control. And for a while it was all too familiar. As if the elapsed time were nothing.

But gradually she recognised that something *was* different. And then, though her body was still unbiddable, she realised that this time her mind remained her own. Although it was like the return of a disease that had been in remission, Judith recognised that she was not the same patient.

Eventually, in the night, Judith was calm enough to stand, then to walk.

The first coherent activity she undertook was to disinfect the telephone. She wiped all its disgusting surfaces with a rag soaked in

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bleach. She wiped the filthy phone wire all the way back to where it entered her house.

With that done, she took the telephone receiver off its cradle. As it lay screaming, she took a steaming-hot bath.

Later yet, she peeled a potato. Then she chopped it into tiny cubes. When the cubes became too small to handle, she started on another potato. Then another. Then another.

When no whole potatoes remained, Judith scooped the piles of seeping potato pieces into the bin and went to bed and slept.

DC Howard returned late in the morning, alone. *Woman's Hour* was on and it was with some reluctance that Judith turned the radio off.

DC Howard said, "You look much better today, Ms. Judd."

"I feel better," Judith said.

"I've contacted Ladbroke Grove since we talked yesterday."

"Oh?"

"They faxed me details of what happened when you lived in Portland Road. It makes miserable reading, I must say. Especially since they never caught him. It must have been hell for you."

Judith felt twitching tightness in her chest, but she controlled it. She said, "It was not a pleasant experience."

DC Howard said, "Then I rang DS Little. Do you remember her? Caroline Little."

"Yes," Judith said. Ferret-faced, mannish little Little.

"She said you were extremely cooperative and did everything you possibly could, but that when the guy was still able to leave messages for you inside your house you finally hit your limit."

"I'd had too much," Judith said to Howard. Growing stronger, she said to herself, "And I would not lay mantraps in my own house."

Conviction-obsessed Little had told her, "Well, if you don't really want to catch him all that badly . . . "

"And so you moved," DC Howard said.

"Yes." Judith said. I ran, she thought.

DC Howard said, "After all that unhappy history, I can just imagine how you must have felt when you got the call yesterday."

Can you? Judith wondered. Then she said, "Can you?"

"But I want to reassure you, Ms. Judd, at Norbury we make an effort to be sensitive to the mental anguish that incidents like these cause their victims. I think I mentioned yesterday we have a specialised team to deal with them. And there is a lot we can do that wasn't available five years ago. For instance, we have the technology

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now where it's easy to trace the telephone the obscene caller is using. It makes it much easier for us to locate the caller and, of course, to make him stop."

"It won't be necessary," Judith said.

"Excuse me?" DC Howard said. "What won't?"

"Your technology. Tracing the caller."

"But . . . ?"

"Because I know who it is," Judith said. "I recognised his voice."

Thomas Gilliom rose with the sun. Although he got out of bed as soon as he awoke, his next action was less certain. Once it would have been to have a cup of tea. But now that tea was not routine, he wandered the upper floor of his house, round and round as if searching for something that was not there.

Eventually he recognised the need to use the toilet. That triggered other actions. Shaving. Combing of hair. Wiping the lenses of his glasses. Then he returned to the bedroom where he slipped off his nightshirt.

Shivering, he dressed in yesterday's clothes and went downstairs.

The kitchen was a mess. Feeling the un-rightness of it all—the empty boxes, dirty bottles, and crusty crockery—Thomas Gilliom had his first thought of the day: "I ought to do something about this stuff." But as he looked round the room again, recognition of necessity was overwhelmed by inertia. There were too many things that needed to be done. Too many places to start. For the first time in the day Thomas Gilliom felt like going back to bed.

But to do that was not right either.

Then he recognised hunger. He searched through the empty boxes until he found one still containing cereal. He located a bowl, a spoon. He rinsed them under the tap. Then he searched for milk, but fruitlessly. None in the fridge, none outside the door.

Undeterred, Thomas Gilliom filled the bowl with cereal. From the tap he ran water into it until he could see the water between the flakes.

As he ate he remembered that yesterday he had resolved to go to the shops and buy some milk. Or was that the day before yesterday?

Why hadn't he done it? Ah. Money. There was money in the house, all right. George made sure of that. Thomas just didn't remember where it was.

* * *

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WPC Menefy did not arrive at Thomas Gilliom's house until midafternoon. She rapped firmly with the brass horseshoe knocker. After an impatient moment she rapped again. Then again. Finally, Thomas Gilliom unbolted the door and opened it a crack. He did not speak

"Are you Thomas Gilliom?" Menefy said.

"Yes."

"I am WPC Menefy from Norbury. You've been a naughty boy, Thomas. May I come in?"

Thomas Gilliom did not respond immediately. He was trying to absorb what had been said to him.

"Do I come in, Mr. Gilliom? Because if you don't let me in, I'm going to have to take you down the nick."

Slowly, Thomas Gilliom opened the door.

WPC Menefy entered Thomas Gilliom's house, but not very far. "What's that disgusting pong?" she asked. But without waiting for his answer she said, "This place is in a shocking state. Does anybody else live here? You got any kids or anything? Phew. This stinks worse than a dead 'un."

When she was finished with Thomas Gilliom, WPC Menefy crossed the street. She rang Judith Judd's bell and fidgeted. She was about to ring the bell again when the door opened.

"Ah," Judith said.

"WPC Menefy," WPC Menefy said. "I was here yesterday. Remember?"

"I remember," Judith said. "Would you like to come in?"

Menefy entered, but no farther than the hallway. She said, "I've been at the house across the street, with your neighbour, Mr. Gilliom."

"I see," Judith said.

"He's in a shocking state. I don't know which stinks worse, him or his kitchen."

Judith didn't know if she was meant to express sympathy. She said nothing.

"Look," Menefy said, "the old geezer lost his wife a couple of months ago and if you ask me he's wigging out. I gather there's a son who looks after the bills and sends the old boy cash, but I'm sure the kid never visits. There's filth everywhere."

"That hardly entitles Mr. Gilliom to make obscene telephone calls," Judith said.

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" 'Course not," Menefy said, "but when I confronted him with it, he totally broke down, blubbering and crying all over the shop. It was pitiful to see. He needs taking in hand, that one. I'm going to dump him in Social Services' lap. It's their job, not ours."

"I see," Judith said.

"And he's not going to bother you again. I spelled out what would happen if he did in neon letters a metre high."

"Thank you," Judith said.

"But, word to the wise, Ms. Judd. You ought to be more careful with your upstairs curtains."

"Excuse me?" Judith said.

"There's a window upstairs. I got the impression you walk around in your underwear sometimes without pulling the curtains. It's easy to forget, I know, but you got to make the effort, you really do."

Judith managed to say, "That's ridiculous."

"Just be more careful, right? And I'm sure you won't have any more trouble with the old guy." WPC Menefy left through the open door. Judith stood and watched her go.

Once he had absorbed and digested what the rude policewoman told him, Thomas Gilliom was appalled to realise the distress he had caused. That was the last thing in the world he intended.

What he had intended was less clear, but it was certainly more in the nature of a wish to share with his neighbour the association he had made between her and his late wife. An association of fabric colour, meaningless in itself and accidentally discovered. The motivation for his call had come from a rush of affection for his wife. The connection to Ms. Judd was vague, but if she hadn't hung up on him, he might have been able to explain it. Or she might have been able to help him work it out, the way Louise so often did when she was alive.

But to distress Ms. Judd!

What Thomas Gilliom resolved to do was difficult, but necessary. For the first time in days he changed his clothes. He put on a tie.

He went outside. He crossed the road to Judith's house. He rang the bell.

Inside, Judith Judd watched from behind a curtain.

Thomas Gilliom rang again.

In control at last, Judith stood her ground.

Finally Thomas Gilliom gave up his errand of apology, for the moment.

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But the energy that had brought him into the bright of day did not drain away. As he stood on the pavement across from his house, he turned instead toward the park, the route to the Hermitage Lane shops, and he began to walk.

As if as a reward for his decisiveness, Thomas Gilliom found his wallet and money in the pocket of his jacket. He remembered now, he had put them there the last time he went to the shops.

As he strode out, Thomas Gilliom made two mental lists. One was of what he fancied to eat. The second was a step-by-step cleanup program for the house. When the house was clean he would invite George over. He could insist. And what was that wife of George's called? The plumpish woman with the rosy complexion and the frown lines.

The name would come back to him.

Inside her house, Judith Judd made lists too. They flooded her with peace, with calm. Her course was so obvious.

For years she had hidden from herself and from the memory of Portland Road. From the telephone calls. The letters. The faxes. The excrement. The broken windows. The slashed tyres. The gouged door. The poisoned dog. The mutilated tree. The wild bird freed in her house. The dead rat. The live mice.

All of it.

Under DS Little's guidance, Judith had changed telephone numbers. Locks. She had added security doors and windows. Alarms. Lights. A watchdog.

But for every move Judith made, there was a countermove. With every attempt at amelioration, things got worse. DS Little was like a doctor whose every treatment brought side effects worse than the disease.

When, finally, *the man* had shown that he could enter Judith's house at will, DS Little said, "That's great! All we have to do is catch him inside."

The disease won. Judith ran.

But now there was a cure.

From inside her house, Judith Judd watched the road. It was nearly an hour before she saw Thomas Gilliom return home, laden with bags.

She gave him five minutes. Then she reached for her telephone. ●

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ANOTHER GRAVE TONE

by JAMES HOLDING

Here lies a banker, Henry Grier,
Whose chief delight was hunting deer.
For as a banker, he was struck
That an antlered male was called a buck.
And he was also pleased to know
That a female deer was called a doe.
So he considered it fun, not funny
To hunt these creatures named for money.
He took his holiday each year
When it was legal to shoot at deer.
And thus were his vacations spent
As many a deer season came and went:
Scouring the nearby mountainside
Where timid deer were known to hide,
In hopes that with a bit of luck,
He'd get a chance to bag a buck.
But not one buck did he see, although
He managed to shoot quite a lot of dough.
Which was, it seems, the leading reason
Why Henry began to hunt off season.
The deer were likely less wary then
Protected by law against guns and men,
And since he found this theory sound,
He hunted on weekends all year 'round.
Nor did he stop to reflect each time
That he was really committing a crime.
All that he pictured, again and again,
Was an antlered head on the wall of his den.
Well, his poaching ploy was a total flop,
But Henry was too obsessed to stop.
Until one day, in a headlong rush
Through a tangle of mountain underbrush,
His gun was accidentally fired
And apparently this is what transpired:
The shot took Henry under the chin,
Entered his brain and did him in.
So 'spite of the dough-hunting skill he'd shown,
Poor Henry now lies here alone
Without one buck to call his own.

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Our Department of First Stories author this month is someone EQMM *readers already know as a versifier of some note. In 1993 Mr. Dobbyn continued his Klondike adventures in verse with "The Preacher," a piece many readers wrote to us about with delight. For his prose debut, Mr. Dobbyn writes of a field he knows well: the law. The author is a professor of law at Villanova Law School. He resides in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania . . .*

FRUIT OF THE POISONOUS TREE

by JOHN DOBBYN

Trevor Townsend, Judge of the Superior Court in and for the County of Suffolk, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, is, by any measure, a piece of work. We were no more than twenty minutes into the argument on my motion for an injunction against Boston Bank & Trust, one of His Honor's favorite charities, when I could actually count six male gophers tunneling through the walls of my stomach. Understandable, since the judge had that finely honed bent of the incurably self-satisfied for meeting every legal argument with a barb dipped in the vitriolic oil of sarcasm.

The afternoon break came mercifully at three o'clock. I rose to the bailiff's cry of "All rise" with the thought of purging my mind with a chocolate blitz at the Bailey's downstairs. The whim died aborning, however, with a crook of Judge Townsend's finger as he departed the bench for chambers. I looked at counsel for the defense for any light she could shed on the summons. She shrugged, smiled, and passed quickly to the free world outside.

Reluctance doesn't begin to characterize my entrance into the judge's chambers. He had shed the robe and sat like Torquemada, ready to welcome the next guest of the Inquisition.

I took his nod as a gracious invitation to make myself comfortable. Tea and macaroons would be served momentarily. Perhaps not.

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"Mr. Knight, I assume I have your confidentiality. I wish to retain your services to represent my son in a criminal matter."

There are jump-shifts in conversation that affect the hinge of your jaw, such that you wonder if you will ever get your mouth fully closed again. This qualified. I think it was seeing the unexpectedly human motion of concern on the judge's Mount Rushmore features that brought me back.

"On what charge, Judge?"

"The allegation is murder in the first degree. My son is a junior at Harvard. He attended a party of college students—not Harvard—at an apartment on Beacon Street last evening. The incident occurred there."

"Where is he now?"

"He is being detained at the Charles Street prison. They're reluctant to depart from the usual bail disallowance in a capital case because of the delicate position of his relationship to a judge. I'm loath to ask special favors for the same reason."

"Certainly not, Judge. Can't soil the old robes just for the sake of getting the kid out of the reach of every rapist at Charles Street that wants to get back at the old man."

Actually, I didn't say that. I just nodded.

"May I assume that you will take the case, Mr. Knight?"

There are two things you don't do as an attorney. One is appear at a medical convention unarmed. The other is turn down a sitting judge.

As long as I was at the Suffolk Courthouse anyway, my first stop was the District Attorney's office. No need sparring with the assistant D.A.s. The top lady herself, Ms. Lamb by name, if not by temperament, would sooner surrender her flesh to the torturers than give up one juicy headline from this case to an assistant.

She was surprised to see me, since nearly all of the criminal practice I took on was in federal court. I had clerked for a federal judge after law school, and a steady stream of indigent appointments came from that source. During my seven years with the firm of Bilson & Dawes (the last two as junior partner), my seniors had harrumphed and scowled over my accepting even federal criminal appointments. It tarnished the pristine image of the three-piece suits who practiced not trial work but civil li-ti-ga-tion. The bearded, whiskey-breathing slouches who frequently populated the firm's waiting room when I took a criminal appointment did nothing to loosen firm policy.

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"You've got to be joking. You represent young Townsend?"

I smiled pleasantly in spite of the inference. "Strange bedfellows, what? Shall we talk business?"

"There's no business to discuss, unless you're offering the full plea of guilty. Have you talked to your client?"

"My next stop. Why are we being inflexible here?"

"Because I'm going to personally walk your boy to the electric chair."

"Might we go through the inconvenience of a trial first?"

She grinned that half grin that they get when they're holding the real cards.

"I'll give him the formality, if he insists, but when the jury reads his confession . . ." Her hands and eyebrows went up in unison. I hate that gesture.

"He confessed?"

"To every detail. He dictated a statement, read it, signed it, and then went through the whole thing again for the video camera. I'll send copies of both to your office."

She leaned in for the killer. "Count on it. He'll burn, at least for this one."

Youth led me to take the bait. "You imply there's more?"

"Four unsolved strangulation-rapes in the last two years. I don't suppose you get beyond the financial pages up at Bilson."

If there was anything soft and cuddly about Ms. Lamb as an infant, she had managed to ossify it in her eighteen years at the bar. At five foot eight, one hundred and twenty-five pounds, dark hair in a bun so tight her nostrils flared, she was one lean, mean, prosecuting machine. Not uncharacteristically in the trade, word had it that she was waiting for the case that could transport her to the state house. This one sent up flares.

"I assume the Miranda warnings reared their ugly heads in the process."

"Right up there at the front."

"I'd have bet on it. And the autopsy report, you'll be pleased to share it."

"You'll be the second one to see it."

Ms. Lamb's grinding arrogance made me long for the warmth of Judge Townsend's courtroom.

Charles Street prison affords a cluster of intimate dwellings measuring six by eight, where the accent is less on privacy than on togeth-

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erness. It seemed to have been constructed around the era of the Tower of London, and probably shared the architect.

I sat waiting in the attorney's room until I found myself looking up a six foot four inch frame to the palest features I have ever seen on an eighteen-year-old. I've seen feeder goldfish thrown into a tank of piranhas looking more in their element than young master Townsend.

I had been fully prepared to resent him, with his Brooks Brothers tweed over chinos over oxblood loafers (no socks)—the uniform of those who were born to attend Harvard. Oddly, there was a humility in his eyes that did not seem born of his present circumstances. I found, out of reflex, that I liked the boy. I fought against it.

"I'm Michael Knight. Your father asked me to come around."

I would have said "represent you," but I still hadn't gotten used to the idea. He held out a well-muscled hand that clamped mine with authority. I raised an eyebrow. He caught my meaning and forced a shy smile.

"Crew."

"And pretty good too." I caught part of the inscription on his T-shirt where the top shirt folded open. Filling in the rest of the letters, my guess was that he had won a regatta singles championship. "I bet a ring went with that."

He flushed a little and then seemed to go into himself when he said, "They took it when I came in. I think they said I could have it when I go to court."

From his expression, my guess was that remembering past victories made the embarrassment more painful.

I nodded him into the wooden straight-back across the table. He hung over the table like a puppy about to be scolded.

"You want to tell me about it, Trevor?"

"Chip."

His eyes came up from the table. I didn't blame him for going for a nickname. I only hoped it was not "off the old block."

"What happened, Chip?"

He was leaning on elbows wide enough apart to accommodate a Mazda. I noticed that his eyes did not retreat to the table. Good sign.

"I got an invitation from a girl I knew to a party at an apartment on Beacon Street around Berkeley. I guess four or five girls live there. It was mostly a group from different colleges around town. I got there about seven-thirty. Had a couple of drinks. I started to feel

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dizzy, sick. Someone brought me up to one of the bedrooms. I fell on the bed and went out cold."

He took a breath before the tough part.

"I woke up about nine . . ."

"How did you know it was nine?"

"There was a clock beside the bed."

I nodded.

"There was a girl in the room. In the bed. I think we'd been arguing."

"After you woke up?"

His eyes drifted. He stood up and walked over to the window that was an eighth-inch glass and a quarter-inch grime that had been collecting since John Adams last washed it. His voice was calm and deliberate.

"I took the belt from a terrycloth robe that was lying on the bed. I put it around her neck and tied a slipknot. I pulled it taut until the breathing stopped. I could see her eyes close. She fell backwards on the bed."

I waited, but there was no more. The wet beads on his forehead belied the quiet tone of voice.

"Why?"

He turned back, almost surprised to see me.

I said, "Why?"

He thought about it. "I think we'd been arguing."

"About what?"

"I can't remember."

"Was she the one who invited you?"

"No. I didn't know her before last night."

"What happened then?"

"I must have passed out. I don't remember anything until somebody dropped me onto the bed in my apartment in Cambridge."

"Any idea of the time?"

"Yes. Ten o'clock. I heard someone say it. It seemed so early, I checked the clock. That was all I remember until the police woke me up. They came sometime early in the morning."

I jotted down some notes and let it sink in.

"What were you drinking?"

He came back to the chair. "Some kind of punch. I don't know. I think it was gin."

"Did you take it, or did someone bring it to you?"

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He thought. "One of the fellas there brought the first one. I took the second."

"Any drugs?"

He shook his head.

"What was the girl's name, the one that invited you?"

"Sue . . . ah, Sue Banner . . . Bannister. I just met her the week before at a football game. I didn't know her well. She called me the night before to tell me there was going to be a party."

"Did you know anyone else there?"

"Couple of the fellas went with me."

He caught me with his eyes before I got the next question out.

"I appreciate what you're trying to do, Mr. Knight, but I did it. There's no point in trying to make a defense. Can we just get it over with?"

What had so far been a perfect loser of a day headed downhill when I got back to the firm. I could read the vicarious pain in my secretary's eyes when she handed me the message slip.

"SEE ME NOW! A.D."

Ask any associate and most of the junior partners what "A.D." stands for, and they'll whisper, "Angel of Death." Alex Devlin—"Lex" to those who are permitted the liberty, which includes the Dalai Lama and a few others—is one who suffers not the foibles of juniors gladly. He has a body like Spencer Tracy, a jaw that could plow snow, and a nose that was designed by the man who laid out the Boston streets.

Word had it that he had been the best of the best in the criminal bar. Ten years ago he hung up his spurs and pulled out of criminal defense work entirely. Nobody at my level knows why, and nobody at his level is talking. They say he had a taste for the grape, but then so does half the trial bar.

Actually he didn't hang up his spurs. He traded them for polo boots. After a year in never-never land, the firm recruited him for the courtroom magic that he still performs in the clean arena of civil litigation.

Word of my summons had apparently circulated, because every associate I passed on my way to the gates of hell took one last look at me in life. I smiled the smile of the brave as I entered the inner sanctum.

He was standing at the window, back to me, and even from that angle the aura was formidable. When he turned around, I was

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moved by the power of the man's presence. It wasn't fear as much as awe.

"You've taken the Townsend defense. Why?"

"I didn't have much choice, Mr. Devlin. It was put to me as a command performance. I still have no idea why he wanted me."

I could feel the heat of his eyes and pitied any witness on cross-examination

"He didn't want you. He wanted me. Now he's got me."

The blank look on my face asked the question. He answered it.

"You carry the firm's name. This case will fill the first three pages of the *Record-American* every night. He knew I couldn't afford to stay out of it."

"If he wanted you, which I don't doubt, why didn't he ask you?"

"He knows I'm out of criminal work." His shoulders sloped a bit, and I couldn't read the look in his eyes as he sat down at the desk.

"Apparently I'm back in it. What have you got?"

I sat opposite him and took out my notebook. I told him everything I knew about the case. My secretary had handed me a manilla envelope from the D.A.'s office when she gave me the note from Mr. Devlin. I opened it and found the signed confession of Chip Townsend and a videotape. I handed over the confession. Mr. Devlin read it and threw it back.

"Read it. Tell me if it squares with what he said."

I ran through it. ". . . belt from a terrycloth robe . . . lying on the bed around her neck . . . slip knot . . . pulled it taut . . . breathing stopped . . . see her eyes close . . . fell backwards on the bed.

"That's it. They also got it on videotape."

I held it up. He gestured to the VCR and television in the corner of the office—standard equipment for trial counsel. I slipped in the tape and turned on the TV. It was a full-body shot of Chip in the D.A.'s interrogation room. After the Miranda warnings, he said his piece

"I took the belt from a robe that was lying on the bed. I put it around her neck and tied a slipknot. I pulled it taut until the breathing stopped. I could see her eyes close. She fell backwards on the bed."

The lines over Mr. Devlin's eyes told me he caught the same thing I did, but I thought I'd let him say it.

"Let me see that confession again."

I took it over. He reread it and looked up at me. Something came alive in his eyes. I nodded.

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"Check your notes."

"I just did. Verbatim. He told the story in exactly the same words three times. What are the chances of that?"

He leaned back. His eyes focused vaguely on a framed picture of two teenage girls, but the action was clearly going on inside. I jumped in before the spark of optimism ignited prematurely.

"That's the good news. The bad news is that the D.A. thinks Townsend is the one who committed that string of rape-strangulations. She can only get an indictment on this one, but she'll do everything but show slides to suggest to the jury that he's the serial killer."

"She does and she'll have a mistrial. What about the autopsy?"

"I spoke to the D.A. We can have it as soon as she gets it."

He came straight forward with one elbow on the desk and the other hand snatching the phone out of its state of rest.

"She's playing games with you, sonny."

"Michael, Mr. Devlin. I prefer to be called Michael."

Or maybe I just thought it, while I watched him strangle the phone and punch numbers.

"This is Lex Devlin. Let me speak to Mrs. Lamb."

A pause, but a short one. She was not about to leave the king on hold, even if he did ignore the "Ms." protocol.

"Angela, Lex Devlin. I'm representing Judge Townsend's son."

I could hear her heart drop across half a mile of Bell Tel cable.

"Be good enough to fax me the autopsy report. I'll need a full set of pictures too. You have my fax number."

Another pause for a tactical decision. Again, the king was not to be denied. Whatever she said amounted to "Yes."

Mr. Devlin wrapped it up with minimum pleasantries and shot me a look. "Don't let 'em stall you, sonny. The M.E. had *that* report finished before the sun came up. Probably delivered it in his pajamas. Bring it in as soon as it gets here."

I was back in five minutes with the report and a stack of photos of a young girl, undressed and beaten unmercifully from the waist up.

He scanned the pictures and winced at each new shot. He picked up the medical examiner's report and walked to the window, mumbling what he was reading. I picked the lowlights out of the copy I had made for myself.

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Cause of death: strangulation.

Contusions, the result of severe blows, as by a human fist, covering the abdomen, chest, and face, inflicted prior to death. . . . two ribs fractured . . . had been sexually assaulted . . . contusion and depression circling the throat . . . wool fibers found in depression as if garroted by loosely spun cord . . . fifteen centimeter circular contusion at back of neck with pressure fracture of first cervical vertebra . . .

Time of death: eleven P.M.

He was still grumbling when he caught up the phone and punched in more numbers. I thought I had become invisible until he glanced over and said, "Listen and learn, sonny."

There were the pat sounds of an official answering voice over the phone

"Let me speak to the medical examiner."

More bureaucratic sounds. I wasn't surprised, since the Suffolk County M.E., Dr. Max Reinert, was known for the kind of arrogance only an entrenched institution can afford.

"Listen, dear. You walk through the swinging door and whisper two words into his pink little ears—'Lex Devlin.' "

My eyebrows must have been somewhere around my hairline, because he shrugged. "Sometimes you've got to call in old debts, Sonny. Remember that when a public official needs a favor."

He was back to the phone. "Max. Thanks. One question. How accurate is the time of death on the girl in the Townsend case?"

The baritone voice boomed through the phone like a speaker.

"Right on the money, Lex. Ten minutes either side."

"How?"

"Three good indicators. Body temperature. She was indoors at room temperature all evening till we got there. The state of rigor confirmed it. Contents of the stomach locked it in. I'd bet my next paycheck on it. More than that, your paycheck."

I saw the closest thing to a smile I could visualize on Devlin's features. "Good job, Max."

Mr. Devlin held the phone with his chin while he pressed the hang-up button with one hand and flipped the Rolodex with the other. He punched in enough numbers to get out of state.

"Dr. Mayhew, please. Lex Devlin in Boston."

Mr. Devlin hit the speaker-phone button and leaned back. A professional but softly feminine voice came over the speaker.

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"Lex, how's my favorite crusader?"

"Damn few holy wars lately, Jean. I need you. Can you give me some time?"

If the pause was for indecision, there was none in the answer.

"When do I book the flight?"

That brought a real grin. "Soon. First a question. I've got a boy, eighteen years old, charged with the sadistic sex-murder of a young college girl. He confessed."

"So?"

"Three times in identical words. Says he was at a party, had a couple of drinks, and passed out. He woke up in his apartment much later. The only thing he recalls about the interim is this mesmerized, almost memorized confession. I saw it on videotape. He seems to believe it. A number of things don't square with the confession. He claims to have strangled the girl with a terrycloth belt. Says he did it from the front, since he could see her eyes and she fell backwards. He's firm on that. The M.E. says she was garroted with a cord that left *wool* fibers, probably from the back since there was a major contusion on the back of the neck and a broken cervical vertebra. The time's wrong too. He remembers being home by ten P.M. The M.E. is certain the time of death was ten minutes either side of eleven o'clock. What do you think?"

"I better come and see him. Was he on drugs that night?"

"He says no."

"Could a drug have been slipped to him?"

Lex looked at me. I nodded and whispered, "The first drink was brought to him by one of the kids at the party."

"Yes it could, Jean."

"There's a possibility the confession could have been suggested to him under a drug like Haldol, the so-called zombie drug. Your boy could have been set up to confess to someone else's doings. Has he been medically tested for drugs, especially the class that induce suggestibility?"

Mr. Devlin pointed a finger at me that got my feet in gear double-time.

"Even as we speak, Jean. Thanks. When can you get here?"

The trial was standing room only. I've always thought that the state misses a bet by not charging admission. This one could have sold out Fenway Park.

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Ms. Lamb bestrode the courtroom like a behemoth, to borrow a phrase. She played society's avenging angel as she led the medical examiner through his paces. She breezed over the facts that didn't square with the confession, and belabored the details of brutality. The clear and present hope was that the jurors would connect those details with the newspaper accounts of the other four murders without her risking a mistrial.

She put on the boy from the party who found the girl's body around midnight. He did not recall seeing Chip leave the party.

Next in the witness box was a boy by the name of Tom Keating who said that Chip came downstairs in a stupor and asked him for a ride home. He could not pinpoint the time.

Then the *pièce de résistance*, her one-way ticket to the governor's office—Chip's confession. First she played it in living color in video. Then she introduced it in permanent written form to accompany the jurors during their deliberations.

I was with Mr. Devlin at counsel table. When the prosecution rested, he stepped up to the plate, so to speak. He put Chip on the stand first, and actually asked him to repeat his confession, to the surprise and, I must say, delight of Ms. Lamb. She couldn't hear it too often. Chip went through it again—verbatim—in that same detached monotone.

Mr. Devlin next called Dr. Jean Mayhew. She was outstanding. He led her gently, but she knew where to go. She gave the jury a class on the suggestibility of confessions, especially when the subject is under the influence of a particular class of drugs.

"Dr. Mayhew, would you tell the jury why such a suggested confession would be convincing?"

She was the voice of scientific reason. "Because under the right conditions of suggestibility, the person is totally convinced of the truthfulness of the false confession. This is particularly true if a drug like Haldol is used. The subject can't be reasoned with or dissuaded."

"Thank you, Dr. Mayhew." *From the bottom of our hearts.*

Mr. Devlin's summation to the jury was a *tour de force*. He cut a mighty swath through Chip's confession with a recap of Dr. Mayhew's testimony, the finding of Dr. Burke of Mass General who tested Chip, at my request, and found traces of Haldol in his blood, and finally, a recitation of the inconsistencies between the medical examiner's findings and the confession—the timing of the death, the

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material used in the strangulation, and the position of the girl as facing away from the murderer during the strangulation. The evidence was circumstantial, but it seemed convincing to me.

Apart from the evidence itself, Mr. Devlin was Daniel Webster standing toe-to-toe with the Devil. He could have read from a box of Cheerios, and if I had been on the jury, I would have acquitted Adolf Eichmann. On the other hand, the members of the jury looked noncommittal.

By the time Ms. Lamb finished her strident closing harangue, imploring the jury to ignore apparent circumstantial inconsistencies and believe the defendant's voluntary and repeated confession, it was late in the day. The judge adjourned until the next morning for the charge to the jury and the retiring of the jurors to deliberate.

I started loading the briefcases to take them back to the office. Mr. Devlin was sitting beside me in a kind of funk. I chalked it up to the drain of his closing argument, until I heard him mumble through his hands, "Damn. It's not enough. It's not complete."

I reached for our set of the medical examiner's blown-up photos, when he took them out of my hand. He sat poring over them while I finished up.

Chip held his gangly cuffed hands out to Mr. Devlin before being led back to the sheriff's van for Charles Street.

"Whatever happens, Mr. Devlin, you gave me the best possible defense. You're beginning to convince me, even though I can still hear those words inside of me. . . . I'm really grateful."

He was no youngster, Mr. Devlin. The old war-horse used to be able to go all night after a performance like that. So went the stories. But now he was played out. I watched him sink back in the chair at counsel's table with his eyes closed.

He was still there when Ms. Lamb ran up to the court clerk and asked to see the judge in chambers. The clerk got permission and summoned Mr. Devlin and me to follow Ms. Lamb into chambers.

Judge Jeffreys had taken off the robe and was down to the suspenders. He waved us to seats from behind his desk.

"This couldn't wait till tomorrow, Angela?"

"Your Honor, I want to reopen for new evidence. This is critical. I just received it two minutes ago."

She laid a photograph on the desk and stood back like Prometheus placing fire at the feet of man. The judge cocked his glasses for a closer look. He handed it over to Mr. Devlin. I got third look. It was a candid shot of a smiling Chip Townsend roughhousing with a boy

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in a fraternity T-shirt who had his left arm locked around Chip's neck. The surroundings could be identified as the apartment where the party took place. It didn't take Columbo to spot the old school clock on the wall. In its unsubtle way, it was screaming eleven-thirty. No wonder Ms. Lamb had reached seventh heaven. The photo placed Chip at the party after the time of the girl's death. One of the pillars of our defense was his testimony that he was home by ten.

"I take it you can authenticate this photo, Angela."

"I can, Your Honor. One of the boys at the party was taking candid shots that night. He just realized the importance of this one and rushed it in."

The judge looked over his glasses at Mr. Devlin. He was unruffled, almost nonchalant, but looking into his eyes was like looking through the face of a fine watch at the meshing of intricate gears.

"Could I ask the worthy District Attorney if she spoke to this photographer before today? What's his name?"

"Charles Bingham. Yes, we've spoken before."

"About the case?"

"Of course. I'd asked him if he could remember Townsend leaving the party. He couldn't. But this photo settles it."

"Perhaps. When you first spoke to young Bingham, did you ask him to bring to your attention anything he later remembered about the case?"

"Certainly."

"And therefore he brought in this picture. How did you hear about young Bingham in the first place?"

"The defendant gave his name as one of the people he knew at the party."

"When?"

"When what?"

"When did the defendant give you his name?"

"He gave it to the police officer when he was arrested."

His eyes were glowing like coals.

"That's interesting. What occasioned the arrest?"

"We got an anonymous tip that there had been a murder."

"And that Townsend had committed it?"

"No. Just that he had been one of the male guests."

Mr. Devlin settled back and looked at the judge. I may be wrong in thinking that a look that signified a single thought passed between them.

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"Your Honor, I move to suppress the photo as evidence."

A steel spring could have come through Ms. Lamb's chair without catapulting her to her feet in better time.

"That's absurd, Your Honor. On what grounds?"

The judge nodded to Mr. Devlin. "Would you care to illuminate, Lex?"

"As Your Honor knows, an anonymous tip that doesn't charge a crime is not sufficient to justify an arrest. The arrest was a violation of Mr. Townsend's constitutional rights. That arrest led to the defendant's telling the police about young Bingham, which in turn led to his bringing in the photograph. It is, in the poetic phrase of Mr. Justice Brennan, 'the fruit of the poisonous tree.' I move to exclude it."

The granting of Mr. Devlin's motion by the judge was the exit cue for Ms. Lamb, which she executed in what could best be described as a high dudgeon. She had gone from a lock on a guilty verdict back to a crap shoot. It was anybody's guess which way the jury *would go on the evidence.*

The photo sat on the desk. Since no one else seemed interested, I picked it up. This case had more whys and hows than a three-year-old.

That night, sometime after midnight, I was in the company of a row of empty martini glasses at the upstairs bar of the Marliave. I was taking my two-thousandth look at the photo, when it grabbed me. The cold air on the dead run to the *Boston Globe* building chilled out the cobwebs. I was cold sober when I reached the photo lab.

The technician of technicians on the night staff was a former client with enough residual gratitude to do a drop-everything favor.

Judge Jeffreys opened the next morning's session with the charge to the jury—an explanation of the law that applied to the case. I slid in beside Mr. Devlin partway through it. I had a bombshell, and I had to risk the sting of the court to whisper my discovery. The judge shot me a look that could have silenced Howard Cosell. Even Mr. Devlin gave me a silencing whack on the knee.

I sat there like a monkey on a barrel of rattlesnakes. But if I was edgy, I noticed that Chip Townsend was twice as agitated. Mr. Devlin was the calm between two storms.

When the charge ended and the jury left the room, Mr. Devlin shushed the both of us and led us to a vacant corner of the courtroom.

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He gave Chip the nod first. The boyish shyness had hardened, and his voice was an explosive hiss.

"There's supposed to be more evidence. Where's the picture?"

Mr. Devlin nodded. "I figured that was what was eating you." He looked at me. "And what have you got for us?"

I leaned in for secrecy. "I had a friend at the *Globe* do a blowup of this section of the picture. Since Chip was home at ten, the big clock on the wall showing eleven-thirty must have been a setup. They forgot one detail. Look at the watch on the wrist of the kid with his arm around Chip's neck. You can see in the blow-up. It says eight o'clock. That's probably the real time. This was rigged evidence. It proves that someone was trying to frame Chip."

I had an immediate seconder. Chip was leaning into both of our faces. "You've got to get the case reopened to get that in. I was framed."

Mr. Devlin looked Chip right in the eyes, but I could feel the fire two feet away.

"Listen to me, you little cockroach, you've played your last game with me. For starters, let's admit among us boys, you raped and killed that girl."

I looked to Chip for a denial. He was stone silent.

"I think you're a psychotic killer, kid. I think you killed four other girls and got away with it. I know you killed this one. I think you went upstairs with that girl and whatever it is that snaps in your mind went off. Only this time you got carried away in the wrong circumstances. You couldn't just walk away. Too many people knew you had gone upstairs with the girl. When they found the body, you knew they'd come looking for you. That's when you came up with that glassy-eyed confession that didn't quite tally with the facts. You fed it to the D.A., and she was so tickled to get it, she dropped the ball on the rest of the investigation. You even took a dose of Haldol because you knew sooner or later I'd check you for it."

Personally, I was blown away, but young Townsend didn't give an inch.

"That photo's got to get into evidence, Devlin."

Mr. Devlin leaned closer, and the heat rose.

"That photo is as phony as you. You had your buddy deliver it so it'd be the last thing the jury'd see. Soon as I saw you and that clock and your pal's arm with the watch up there like a beacon in one cute package, I knew what you had in mind. You figured the D.A.'d bite like a trout, and she did. Since you had us primed to look for a

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frame-up, you knew we'd catch on to the difference in times. I'd expose the frame-up, and the jury'd acquit. Don't play boys' games with men, kid. I had it suppressed. The jury'll never see it."

Chip was sputtering. "You can't keep out defense evidence!"

Mr. Devlin walked away. "I can when it amounts to perjury."

I caught Mr. Devlin in the corridor. "You've got to tell me. How did you know he was guilty?"

His voice was back to normal. "That picture the M.E. took of the circular contusion on the back of the dead girl's neck. Two straight lines leading toward each other in the middle of the circle. That bothered me until yesterday afternoon when our grateful client shook hands with me. It perfectly matched the oars on the crest of his championship crew ring."

Before he walked away, he actually smiled at me. "That was good work on the photo, sonny. You might be worth something yet."

I recovered from the glow enough to yell after him, "What do you think the jury'll do?"

I saw the shoulders go up in a shrug. "Frankly, I think they'll nail him. We raised some smoke, but don't ever underestimate those twelve sweethearts in the jury box. God bless them, they pay more attention to their instincts than to the lawyers."

I turned to carry the bags back to the office and get on to other things, when his voice caught me.

"Hey, sonny."

He turned around on his way out the door.

"As soon as they come in with the guilty verdict, we file a motion for a new trial. This time we defend on insanity. At least he'll avoid the chair. Get on the research now. By the way, what's your first name?"

I've got to admit, it was a great day—despite the guilty verdict.

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Author of the Edgar-winning Anna Peters mysteries, the first of which appeared in 1975, Janice Law has also written mainstream books and short fiction. Her early Anna Peters novels were published by Houghton Mifflin, followed by two well-reviewed entries in the series from Walker and Company in 1989 and 1991. Most recently the books have found a home at St. Martin's Press, which released A Safe Place to Die *in 1993 and will publish* Backfire *later this year. . . .*

RESURRECTION

by JANICE LAW

Pam poured herself a cup of coffee, wiped up the drips, then sat down at the kitchen table. It couldn't be; it simply couldn't be. Steve had promised. "Of course," he'd said, as if he'd expected her feelings would be hurt, "I'm outta here. I can't ever come back. You'll have to live without any help from me."

She remembered the day: overcast and close, with a storm brewing somewhere out in the Atlantic, the barometer falling, and the Weather Channel making noises about possible gusty winds. Just the kind of day they needed, the kind they'd been waiting for ever since Steve had said, "You know, there's always plenty of money if you know how to get it."

Right from the start, Pam had hated the idea, but she'd told herself that it was just more of Steve's bluster. She'd been dead wrong. With a tight, nasty smile, he had pulled out the insurance policy, and Pam had gotten a shock when she saw that it was over a year old. While they'd been scrambling for every penny as the housing market withered and their contracting business sank, he'd been paying on a million-dollar life-insurance policy. She'd known he was serious then, and she'd been terrified—of deceit, of police, of storms. Later, she'd been terrified of him and given in.

Of course, he hadn't listened to her protests and warnings. "It's a piece of cake," he'd kept insisting. The only possible chance for fail-

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ure was her loss of nerve: she had to be smart, he kept saying. What he meant was, she had to be smart enough to do just what he told her

But that was Steve: make plans, give orders, and let someone else pick up the pieces. He swam ashore and disappeared to a cheap motel in Jersey; Pam had been left with the Coast Guard, the local police, the state police, and the insurance investigators, left to weep and whimper and lie through her teeth. Fortunately, she'd been convincing, in shock half the time and under nice Dr. Westin's sedatives the other half. The boat was maybe dubious and the policy suspicious, but she, Pam Sarbo, grieving widow, had been one hundred percent. Eleven months later, the Hartford insurance giant had paid off handsomely.

Pam took a sip of her coffee, slopping a little more on the table. She hadn't been nervous since—until now. Now she was as trembly as when she'd been married to Steve, when she'd always been anticipating crises and tempers and the black clouds that blew up as suddenly as the storm of six years ago, the storm that had liberated her from Steve and his contracting business and given her—yes, she had to admit it—a pleasant and comfortable new life.

The house, for example: a sensible, one-and-a-half-story cottage with an old stable adjoining that served as garage and office, and a pretty yard where she was planning to make a water garden. The cottage was good value, a little house in a prime neighborhood, and though the market was low now, her friend Marge at the realty assured her that sound nineteenth-century buildings were always saleable.

Not that she ever wanted to sell! She loved the house and the neighborhood. Vickie was happy in school, sixth grade this year, the little accounting business that Pam had started was doing surprisingly well, and Jack Malon, who came for dinner every Wednesday night and took her out every Friday and Saturday, lived just three miles away. Her life suited her very well, thank you.

And now, on a fine September morning, just twenty minutes after the school bus had stopped for Vickie, came a voice on the phone: Steve was at a phone booth somewhere in town.

She'd tried to stall him, but he'd known Vickie would be in school, and, more ominously, he'd known Pam worked at home and that her office didn't open until ten. That meant Steve had been around, watching her, watching Vickie. Pam was frightened, and then she was angry: they'd agreed; he'd gotten his share. She'd been left with

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the boat to sell and the business to wind up and the explanations to make. He had no right to come back and endanger them both, no right at all, but when she heard the knock on the back door, Pam's heart jumped again: she realized that she'd always been afraid of Steve.

When she opened the door, Pam found a heavy man with a long straggling beard, a Red Sox cap, and a faded blond ponytail standing on the stoop. It took a few seconds before she saw his angry little blue eyes and his large hands and knew it was, indeed, her husband.

"You letting me in," he asked, "or are we talking in the yard?"

Pam stepped aside. Steve walked into the kitchen, looked around, then opened a cabinet door and checked the hinges. "I'd have gone with laminate," he said. "Not bad, though. What's the lot size?"

"Just over an acre." Pam's voice sounded scratchy and Steve smiled.

"Long time, huh? Bet you're surprised."

"You made the plans," Pam said and sat down, hoping to feel anchored and less liable to be blown away in the storm to come.

"You try starting over," he said. "You got everything, remember, the house, the boat, the business. You try starting from scratch where nobody knows you."

Pam did not dare mention that the business had been loaded with debts, the house mortgaged, the boat jinxed and difficult to sell. "You're broke," she said.

"Cash flow's not what it could be. I've got ideas, though. There's always money if you've got ideas." He rubbed his hands together, a brisk, businesslike gesture that stripped off his old jeans and dirty windbreaker and brought back Steve Sarbo, Jaycees stalwart, Young Shoreline Businessman of 1985, entrepreneur, builder, bully.

"Who are you now?" she asked.

"Bill Simon. I've been hauling lumber. I had trouble with the truck on the interstate and had to lay over till the fuel pump got fixed. I was waiting around in Stamford and I got thinking about you and Vickie."

"Vickie's fine," Pam said quickly.

"And you too, I can see." He looked around the room, an elaborate, appraising gesture.

"I've worked hard."

"And played hard, too. Jack Malon, right?"

How well informed he was! Pam kept her voice level with an effort. "I see him occasionally. It's been six years. People would have wondered if I never went out."

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"And you were always so careful about what people thought, weren't you! But Jack Malon, Riverton police force? Isn't that too much? I wouldn't like to think what he'd say if he was to find out."

"There's no good reason for him to find out," Pam said, but her mouth had gone dry. She'd put that thought right out of her mind. After months and months of worry, she'd done what she'd learned to do with unpleasantness: buried it right down deep in the bottom of her mind, along with the idea that the insurance would find out, or that Vickie would.

"Not if you're sensible," Steve said. "Not if you're willing to help me out." His smile told her that he could not conceive of her refusing.

"What do you need?" she asked, though she already knew the answer.

"Five hundred dollars would be about right. Five hundred dollars would help out a lot right now."

That was the first time. Pam had gotten her coat, gone to the bank, and been back in half an hour. Perhaps that had been her mistake, perhaps she should have temporized, made excuses, pleaded poverty. Maybe that would have made a difference, maybe not. In any case, Steve soon got into the habit of stopping by on his runs for the timber company, and Pam got used to having to revise all her estimates: the water garden had to be postponed, insulating the office was delayed, and a real furnace for the building was definitely out. It got so that Pam was skimping on Vickie's school clothes and reading up on thrifty meals, but Steve was inexorable.

"You've more house than you need," he said more than once. "You could sell this place and buy something modern, convenient. Take those condos south of town. They're practically giving them away."

Pam felt her heart jump: she'd never sell the house. He couldn't make her, she thought, and then she thought that he could make her lose it, and muttered something about the weak market.

"Weak *northeastern* market. Listen, I see the country. There're places where you can get twice as much property for half as much money. That's what we should do. Sell up here and start over again."

Pam froze in her chair and looked outside at the cold February rain running down the windows. He couldn't mean it! He couldn't imagine that they could just take up where they'd left off! The whole idea made her sick. But "we" was turning up in his conversations entirely too often, and he was dropping by more frequently, arriving later, staying longer, slowly but irrevocably pushing her carefully

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constructed life apart like some terrible psychic bulldozer.

The first sign, she realized now, was his affection for the stable loft. Pam had nearly had a heart attack one morning when she'd gone out to her office early and heard him coming down the stairs. He'd had a sleeping bag over his arm and from his proprietary grin, she'd known he'd somehow gotten a key cut. "Could be made quite nice," he told her and suggested that she see about renovations. Since then, he'd often slipped into the loft at night, teasing her in the mornings with the idea that he was "saving her money"—by camping out there where Vickie or the neighbors might see him!

"No reason why we couldn't start over again somewhere else," he said now. "No reason at all. I've got a social security card, driver's license, birth certificate. I'm Bill Simon. You move away from here—hey, you're going to meet some guy, aren't you? Why not me?"

Pam felt the force of his will, of his selfishness and greed. The idea of living with Steve again made her feel sick to her stomach. She knew she must conceal this reaction and brought up the risks.

But though she couched everything in terms of their safety, his safety, he saw that she was unenthusiastic and turned nasty. He banged around the kitchen, broke her favorite vase, threatened her with the police and the insurance adjusters, and ended by demanding that she break off with Jack. When she tried to postpone that, when she said that Jack would wonder, that friends would ask questions, Steve sneered and blustered and threatened to wait for Vickie. Pam got him out of the house with her last two hundred dollars only a few minutes before the school bus arrived.

That night, she sat up thinking for a long time. Although Pam knew that she did not want to go anywhere with her husband, she knew herself well enough to know that if he worked on her long enough, she'd give in. She'd given in, after all, over the insurance fraud, which she hadn't wanted, hadn't liked, had dreaded every minute. But Steve had twice her energy and twice her confidence; if she didn't escape, he'd wear her down in the end, and she'd be right back where she had been: trying to please a man who basically could not be pleased and locking up her feelings where he couldn't get at them.

The way Pam saw it, she had only a few choices: she could go to the police herself or call his bluff or . . . She hesitated at "or" for some time, and it was only when she was well into what she simply couldn't do—things like firearms, axes, rat poison, vehicular homi-

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cide—that Pam realized she would very much like her husband dead.

She found the idea surprisingly easy to take. The problem was that she didn't think she could kill him. In fact, she was sure she couldn't. Steve had always been the decider, the doer, the pusher—as he'd been fond of telling her. She couldn't be expected to murder him; somehow, it would have to be all his doing.

Pam could see that arranging such a happy state of affairs presented a great many problems. She told herself that she was an intelligent woman who'd managed on her own once and could do it again. Still, it was a long time before she hit upon an idea that was so simple yet so seductive that she began to act upon it at once, before she could lose her nerve.

The next day, Pam canceled her clients and worked on finishing the insulation for the garage. She ordered some good, super-tight windows and, as they were stock sizes, managed an early delivery.

"You're not going to be running that wood stove with these, are you, Pam?" Andy Harnett, her contractor, asked when he brought them over. Andy was a nice fellow who'd bought a lot of Steve's equipment when she'd had to sell off the business.

"No, no, Andy. I know it's got to be replaced. I'm thankful you spotted the problem, but no can do at the moment."

"I can haul it out for you, if you want."

"Oh, that pot of ivy hides it okay for now. If you pull it out, I'll have squirrels in through the vent unless I get that fixed, and I'm going with a new, efficient stove as soon as I have the money."

"Off-season's the time to buy," Andy agreed. They talked about that, about the dreadful economy, about postponements, about how if everyone just went out and bought what they needed, things would get rolling again.

"It's like my water garden," Pam said. "I figure if I don't get it in soon, it's off till next year."

"How are you putting it in? You going to dig all that yourself?"

"I thought I'd ask for the loan of that little backhoe you have. You know I can run those things. I used to run one for Steve back when he was just starting." Pam thought it well to let her eyes get teary.

"I'd forgotten that!" Andy said. "How time flies, huh? Yeah, you can do that. Call me early any morning, and you can have it for an hour before it's got to go on the job. Or I can maybe drop it off to you the night before."

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"You're a prince, Andy," Pam said. "And those windows are perfect. I think they'll be worth every penny."

Steve said the same thing when he arrived two nights later. He approved of keeping up "their" property, of smartening the place up. "Yuppie buyers for this sort of place—they want those little extra goodies."

"Well," said Pam, "the windows should let me start using the office again for clients pretty soon. With the leaky old ones it's been too damn cold to work in there."

"Run the stove. I can fix that for you."

"Andy Harnett says it's not safe."

"What does Harnett know? Huh? He can hardly read a blueprint. He's not any furnace technician."

"He knows enough to know it's a total loss; the firebox is all but burned out. And he warned me that the venting never was right."

"Who are you going to listen to," Steve asked, "him or me?"

"I had the choice of fixing the windows or replacing the stove," Pam said evenly. "For some reason or another I didn't have enough money for the heat."

"You worry too much. Crack a window and you'll be fine."

"I had them fitted with locks," she said. "Security since I'm not in there all the time. I'm not opening those up till spring."

Steve frowned. He hated to be contradicted. When they'd argued first about the original plan, he'd brushed off all her warnings and reservations. She knew how he'd react now.

"Just remember," she said. "If you're going to be up in that loft, don't light the stove. Please. It's too dangerous. Promise me, Steve."

"Sure," he said, "don't worry," but during the night, Pam woke up with the smell of wood smoke and reset her alarm for five-thirty, when she called Andy Harnett about borrowing the backhoe. It was out front by six, and by six forty-five, half an hour before she had to wake Vickie, Pam had scooped out an oblong depression twelve feet in diameter, just right for the garden reflecting pool—and ten feet deep, just right for Steve—if, that was, anything unfortunate had happened to him overnight.

At seven-fifteen, the pond excavation was the required two-and-a-half- to three-foot depth, the little backhoe was parked outside, and Pam was resolutely putting the previous twenty minutes out of her mind. She knew how to do that; living with Steve had taught her how, and the events of six years before had been her final exam.

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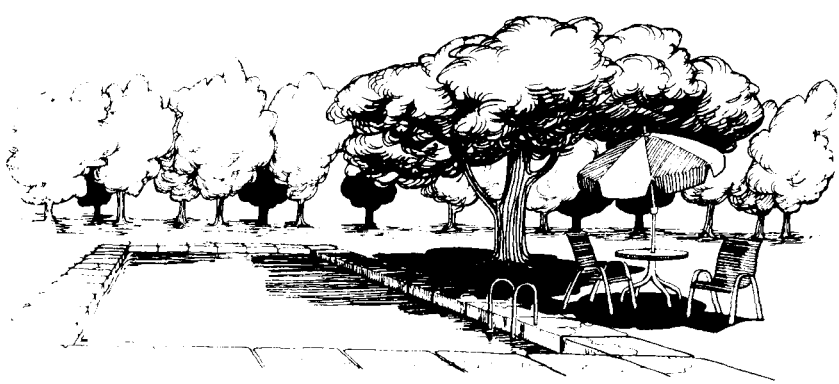
Yes, she really could thank him for that. The business with the boat had bothered her off and on for years, but she did not think that Steve's disposal would bother her at all. She could honestly say that she hadn't had to lift a finger, and by the time Vickie had left for school and Andy had stopped by and been thanked and driven away the shovel, Pam was already planning her water garden and thinking how peaceful and pretty it would be on summer nights with all its floating lilies.



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The Final Paragraph

AMOS'S LAST WORDS

by Henry Slesar

"The sad thing," Detective Killian said, "is that old Amos died a cynic."

Captain Klein, at the wheel of the police vehicle, raised a bushy eyebrow. "You know better than that, 'Justice is Blind' means that justice is *impartial,* not sightless."

"I don't think Amos meant it that way. Not after finding his boss murdered. I think it was bitterness," Killian said.

Forty years ago, when the widowed Loomis became Justice of the State Supreme Court, Amos had been hired as his factotum. He drove his car, made his meals, and listened to his opinions. Amos may not have understood much of what he heard, but it gave him a veneration for the law.

Now both men were dead; Loomis by a bullet through the heart, Amos by a heart that failed when he saw the lifeless body.

"What's really sad," Captain Klein said, "is that we know who killed the old man. It may look like a simple robbery—"

"That's just what it was," Killian said, "except they weren't after money. It was that photograph."

It was Killian who first learned about the snapshot in the retired justice's possession. The old man had obviously read about the gangland slaying of Pete "the Meat" Hennessy. Killian, in charge of the investigation, hadn't been shy about naming the chief suspect: Hennessy's longtime rival, Lippy Vegas. Lippy wanted Hennessy dead, and got his chance behind the stands of a local racetrack.

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It had been a clean, professional hit, with a clean professional alibi. Lippy claimed to be nowhere near the track that day, and had three witnesses to prove it. The witnesses had shady pasts, but their testimony was good enough to forestall an indictment.

Then Killian got the phone call from Loomis.

With only a slight quaver in the eighty-year-old throat, he said; "I think you'll be interested in a letter I just received from a lady named Carol Coster."

Killian reacted. "Lippy Vegas's girlfriend?"

"Ex-girlfriend, apparently. He must have broken off rudely, because she sent me a candid photograph of him, taken at the racetrack."

"But why? I mean, why did she send it to you?"

"It seems her mother was my court stenographer for years and her daughter has an aversion to the police. With any luck, it should help your case a great deal."

"How? Lippy Vegas was always at the track."

"The picture includes the tote board." The old man smiled. "You won't have any trouble establishing the date and time . . ."

"I'll be right over!" Killian said.

Unfortunately, he wasn't quick enough. By the time they reached the Loomis house, someone had shot and killed the old man and ransacked the study. There was no photograph. Only the stricken Amos, gasping out the final three words of his life. They had driven less than half a mile of their return journey when Killian suddenly shouted with excitement.

"Turn the car around!" he said. "I've got the answer!"

WHAT WAS THE MEANING OF AMOS'S LAST WORDS?

(See page 155)

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Joining EQMM*'s Canadian contingent (which includes authors James Powell and William Bankier) Torontonian Peter Sellers takes on a uniquely Canadian subject. His economical and lively style is just right for this tongue-in-cheek tale of Quebeçois terrorists in the nineties . . .*

BOMBED

by PETER SELLERS

Nobody objected at first when Gregoire said they were going to blow up Hannigan.

Nobody objected at all when Gregoire said he would make the bomb and plant it. After all, Gregoire had made and planted bombs all over Montreal and Ottawa back in 1970, during the heady days of the *Front de Liberation du Quebec.*

True, most of those bombs had never exploded. And two that did had gone off prematurely, one of them blowing the left hand and right arm off the high school student who'd unwittingly been paid five dollars to deliver an unmarked package to the British consulate. But that was over twenty years ago, when Gregoire had been very young. Since then he'd done time, and everyone figured he knew a little more now.

They were sitting in a damp cellar in Toronto, sipping cheap French wine from plastic cups. They had come to Toronto because that was where Hannigan lived. It was where Gregoire intended Hannigan should also die. It was late afternoon and a thin shaft of sunlight slanted in from the one small, high, western-facing window. It was the only light. Gregoire insisted on that, and he also insisted on the uncomfortable meeting place. They would all, he said, have to get used to life on the run.

Gregoire knew all about that, too. After the 1970 bombings, he had spent eight months scurrying around Quebec trying to elude the police he thought were chasing him. They, on the other hand, had assumed he was in Morocco with others of his terrorist cell, and would never have caught him if he hadn't started a violent argu-

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ment with an Anglo shopkeeper in the Eastern Townships who refused to speak to him in French. Gregoire got so angry at the *maudit Anglais* that he punched him in the nose. The local Quebec Provincial Police officer arrested him and through a routine check discovered Gregoire to be one of the ten most wanted FLQ terrorists.

But those were the glory days. None of Gregoire's former compatriots would have anything to do with him now. His ideas were too radical. Even at the universities, once hotbeds of unrest, the students were more interested in business careers and job security than in bombing and manifestos and ransom demands.

So they were three. Menard was still there from the old days, his battered beret at a sloppy angle on the right side of his head while a smoking Gauloise balanced it off by dangling perpetually from the left side of his mouth. He was short and wide and plump and his eyes were moist and unhappy.

Dumoulin, an Anglo from Manitoba who did not speak French despite his name, was involved by a stroke of chance. One day he was sitting at a café table next to the one Gregoire and Menard were using. Their conversation was heated and in French so Dumoulin could not follow it, but he heard the word "plastique" mentioned several times and that was enough.

At first, when Dumoulin spoke to them softly and in English, they ignored him. But when he persisted, and told them that if they wanted plastique he could help, they began to listen, Menard translating for Gregoire, who refused to speak, or hear, any English at all

Dumoulin had been dishonorably discharged from the Canadian armed forces the year before. He had taken with him a lingering hatred for the Canadian government and two pounds of plastic explosive, smuggled out in marble-sized balls over a period of ten months. He had simply been waiting for an opportunity to use it in a meaningful way.

He kept one of the small lumps of explosive with him at all times, just in case. To show he was serious, Dumoulin took the explosive out of his pockets and dropped it on the table between the Quebecois conspirators. Menard drew back in shock, hands raised as if to ward off the blast. Even Gregoire was startled.

Dumoulin laughed as he picked up the formless blob. "Cool it, boys," he said. "This stuff's stable as dirt. You could play handball with it and nothing'd happen. But detonate it . . . ," he smiled and made a soft "kaboom" with his lips, ". . . and it's good night, nurse."

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Gregoire wasn't sure what nurses had to do with anything. After he was through, even doctors wouldn't help, but he let it go. He knew as well as anyone that all Anglos were crazy. "You can get more?" Gregoire asked through Menard.

Dumoulin spoke the only French he knew. *"Oui,"* he said with a smile. So Dumoulin became a terrorist and Gregoire became armed and dangerous.

"We'll put the bomb in his car," Gregoire said with a smile. He had put bombs in mailboxes and checked them at bus terminals and placed them outside private homes alongside the morning milk delivery. But Gregoire had never put a bomb in a car, and the prospect excited him very much.

"Timer?" Dumoulin asked.

Gregoire shook his head. "Too risky," he said, more cautious now than when he was a young man. "He might not be in the car when it goes off. I'm going to hook it up to his cellular phone. Then, when he takes the car out, we make a business call."

When Dumoulin left to retrieve his cache of explosive, Menard stayed behind. There was, after all, still the heel of the bottle. He poured the last of it into his glass too aggressively, and some splashed onto his hand. He licked it off, then expressed his concern to Gregoire. "Do you think this is a good idea?"

"Quoi? What?"

"Blowing up this 'annigan? He's very well known."

"That's exactly the idea," Gregoire bellowed, slamming his fist on the rickety card table so that Menard had to dive forward to keep his wineglass from toppling.

"But won't it bring the authorities after us too seriously? Perhaps we should start small. With a security guard or the nanny of a government official."

"Tabernac!"

"A politician, then?" Menard offered meekly.

"We've killed politicians before. Nobody cares about them. But 'annigan, the man so many have adopted as the voice of English Canada, his death will cause a stir." He fixed Menard with a reptilian glare. "Who else, other than 'annigan, has denounced us in a book on the *New York Times* bestseller list and in American magazines, making all *Quebecois* out as buffoons, villains, and cowards?"

"Personne," Menard answered sadly. "Nobody."

"Who else has attacked us, like a coward, from the protective bosom of Toronto?"

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"Personne."

"So, who would be a better first strike for us? Whose death would send up a larger cheer all across *la belle province?"*

"Personne."

"Ask me no more stupid questions. It is 'annigan. And it is soon. Is there any more wine?"

Hannigan walked to meet his publisher. It wasn't far, about a mile and a half away, and it was one of those perfect autumn days Toronto enjoys. The air was clean and crisp, the sky was blue and clear, the leaves were a wonderful collage of red and yellow and orange. After the meeting, he'd walk back to get his car and drive to Susan's apartment on the other side of town.

Days like this, Hannigan didn't miss Montreal. He had left initially because he wanted to write about Quebec from a distance; to sense for himself what people outside the province felt about what was going on there. Now he didn't think he could ever return there to live. He kept his summer place in the Eastern Townships, and sometimes he missed the sensual excitement of Montreal at night, but it had changed too much to be his home anymore.

Besides, he had Susan here now. He whistled aloud and shuffled his feet through the leaves as he walked.

Getting into Hannigan's car was a piece of cake. Gregoire had learned about more than just bombs during his time inside.

Gregoire sat on a bench across the road from Hannigan's condominium, the material for the bomb in a brown paper lunch bag at his side. He sat there patiently for slightly over two hours and, finally, he saw the front door of the building open and Hannigan emerge and stroll briskly along the street without so much as a glance in Gregoire's direction. Gregoire sat ten minutes longer before standing, picking up his lunch bag, and walking casually across the road. He walked along the driveway towards the entrance to the underground garage and after two minutes he heard the automatic door begin to rumble open. Ducking behind a garbage dumpster, Gregoire watched a blue mini van emerge and as soon as it had passed him, he broke from cover and sprinted towards the closing door. He raced down the steep ramp and hurled himself under the door moments before it shut.

Rising, he dusted himself off and began looking for Hannigan's license number. It wasn't hard to find. The garage was almost

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empty. After a quick check to make sure he was unobserved, Gregoire was inside the car in a matter of seconds. He crouched down below the dashboard and went to work. The plastique he packed under the driver's seat, pushing it securely into the springs. Menard had cautioned him that he had enough of the stuff to demolish a ten-story building, but Gregoire didn't want to take any chances.

"That's a hell of a whoopee cushion," Dumoulin had said. Menard had tried to translate, but Gregoire still wasn't sure what the *maudit Anglais* was talking about.

The rest of the installation was simple enough. Gregoire's homemade detonator was packed into the plastique and attached to two fine black wires that led out to the phone where it was positioned over the top of the drive shaft. Gregoire tucked the wire as discreetly as possible into the seams in the carpeting, then hooked it up so that the electronic impulse of the phone starting to ring would send a signal snaking down the wire to the detonator, and Hannigan would be annihilated before he even had time to wonder who was calling.

With the bomb in place, Gregoire now had to find the phone number. It was easy. Hannigan, like so many fools, had it written in a small telephone directory in the glove compartment. Gregoire copied the number down on a slip of paper, checked it, then checked it again. Satisfied, he eased himself out of the car and locked the door. He arched his back once to stretch out the kinks, walked briskly through the garage, jumped vigorously on the cable to open the automatic door, and sauntered out into the sunlight, throwing the empty lunch bag into the dumpster as he passed.

"Why don't we just go back to Montreal, now?" Menard asked. "After all, the bomb is planted. Sooner or later someone will call him and blow him to hell."

Gregoire shook his head. "No," he said. "Someone will not call. I will call. And I'll be close at hand when I do." It was a matter of pride with Gregoire. He had declared war, and he wanted to be the one to push the buttons.

"There was another death threat," Bulivant said, tossing a sheet of paper onto his desk in front of Hannigan.

Hannigan looked at it casually. The content was the same as many of the others, barely comprehensible, but this time it had been done on a personal computer, enlivened with a variety of typefaces

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and fonts, to give it more instant visual impact. "It's the prettiest so far," Hannigan said with a smile.

"You can laugh. The police don't think it's funny."

"They've seen this, have they?"

Bulivant nodded. "They have the original. This is a photocopy."

"We've never had one done on a Mac before, have we?"

"No." Bulivant shook his head. "Look, I'm starting to get nervous," he said. "I got into publishing because I thought it would be quiet and safe. Now death threats are arriving at the office every other day, some of them aimed at me. God knows how long before they start sending bombs in padded envelopes marked 'Manuscript.' I don't know why you find this so amusing, and why you're egging them on."

"I'm not egging them on. But every time something like this arrives, it boosts sales. What's the next printing?"

"We just increased it to seventy-five thousand."

"That makes four printings and two hundred and fifty thousand books in just over six months. At that rate, I say, keep those cards and letters comin' in, folks. Besides, these guys won't do a damn thing. Trust me. Assassination is like sex. You don't talk about it, you do it. The guys to worry about are the ones you never hear from."

Bulivant shook his head and sighed. "All I need now is to get Salman Rushdie under contract."

"I think the Ayatollah beat you to it," Hannigan said. "Now let's talk about that last royalty statement."

Gregoire never let his small cadre communicate with the media in any way. He certainly wouldn't have permitted direct contact with Hannigan. Let the fools who wrote to Hannigan draw the attention before the fact. After he was dead, then Gregoire would let them know who was really prepared to take action. Who was really to be listened to. Who was really to be feared. So, no. No threats in the mail. No contact with the quarry. The only time they'd even come close to that would be that one fatal phone call.

Gregoire placed that call for the first time later that afternoon. From their vantage point outside Hannigan's apartment, they watched him drive away and then they walked as casually as the circumstances allowed to a nearby public telephone. Gregoire fished in his pockets for a quarter, but found none. "Have you a quarter?" he asked Menard.

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Menard frowned and fumbled through his pockets, eventually digging out a coin. Gregoire slipped it into the phone and carefully dialed the number he'd copied down on his sheet of paper. After dialing he waited in eager expectation for the phone to start to ring. He wondered what would happen when the explosion came. Would he be cut off in mid ring? Would he feel some trembling vibration down the line? Or, and this would be the best of all, would a clinical computer-generated voice come on the line and announce, "We're sorry, the number you have dialed is no longer in service."

Gregoire was so engrossed in these thoughts that he didn't immediately notice that the first ring was not cut off. Nor was the second. Nor the third. And the voice that answered the phone in the middle of the fourth ring wasn't generated by computer, but by a cheerful woman who said, "Hello?"

Gregoire was stunned. He couldn't figure out what was happening. He couldn't think of anything to say.

"Hello?" the voice said again. "Is anyone there?"

Gregoire held the phone as far away from his face as the phone booth would allow and stared at it in a mixture of confusion and irritation. From a distance, he heard the woman's voice repeat, "Hello? Hello?" Then she hung up and the phone in Gregoire's hand began to buzz. After a few more seconds, he slammed down the receiver and left the phone booth.

"What happened?" Menard asked.

Gregoire stared at Menard as if he didn't know who he was. Then he said, *"Je ne sais pas.* I don't know."

"There was something wrong with the bomb?"

"No, *trou d'cul,* there's nothing wrong with the bomb. There's something wrong with that phone. It misdialed on me. Or there's something wrong with the phone company. They misdirected my call. But the bomb is perfect."

"Perhaps you copied the number down wrong," Menard suggested gently.

"Tabernac!" Gregoire exploded, and Menard spat the butt of his Gauloise to the sidewalk and fumbled for a fresh one. "We will try again from another phone."

Two blocks along the street, Gregoire and Menard found another phone booth. Gregoire took the slip of paper with Hannigan's phone number on it from his pocket and stared hard at it, frowning. Menard patted his pockets again in search of another quarter but found nothing.

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"*Rien*," he said to Gregoire.

"Well let's go and get some," he said, walking briskly away. Menard stuffed his hands into his pockets and shuffled along the street. They stopped in a donut shop and Menard bought them each a day-old cruller. He paid with a five-dollar bill, giving Gregoire a quarter from the change, and Gregoire went to the phone on the wall beside the exit.

Gregoire studied the number one last time before dialing. He punched the numbers slowly and carefully.

This time he didn't think about what might happen on the other end of the line. He restrained himself from visions of twisted metal and severed limbs and focused instead on what he could hear. The musical tone of the number dialing, the crackling pause while he waited for the connection, and then the ringing. Once. Twice. Three times. And the same woman's voice abruptly on the end of the line, "Hello?"

Gregoire was stunned, and this time he knew he had to say something, but what? He hadn't spoken English in such a long time. Suddenly, without being able to stop himself, he blurted out, "Are the pants ready?"

This time the silence was on the other end of the line. Then the woman's voice came back, bemused. "Pants? I'm afraid you have the wrong number."

"*Moi aussi*," Gregoire said. "Me too. *Pardonez-moi.*" And he slammed down the phone, cursing. He knew he hadn't misdialed. This time he knew the phone company had made a mistake. Maybe he should blow them up next. He left the donut shop hurriedly and Menard darted after him, brushing crumbs from his shirt.

"No luck?" Menard asked.

"It's not a question of luck," Gregoire snapped. "Something is not right."

"Are you going to try again?"

"Later. Now I need a glass of wine and time to think."

Menard's expression brightened noticeably.

The third time the phone rang in Susan Bellamy's apartment, she picked it up hesitantly. The last two calls had been odd, and curiously unsettling. True, there'd been no heavy breathing or guttural obscenities, unless you considered a bizarre request about pants obscene. But there was still something not quite right. Susan picked

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up the receiver on the third ring. "Hello?" she said after a moment's pause.

Then she did hear breathing, what sounded like a sigh of disappointment, and the same thick French accent from before asked, "Is Guillaume there?"

"No," she said. "There's no one here by that name."

The voice sighed again and rattled off a telephone number, interspersing English and French digits intermittently, asking if that was the number he had called. Susan wasn't exactly sure what number he'd quoted, but she recognized enough to know it wasn't hers. "No," she said. "I'm afraid you've got the wrong number." Then she hung up, very puzzled indeed.

"I've had a couple of phone calls," Susan said after she'd shut the door behind Hannigan and kissed him for a very long time.

"Who from?"

"I don't know. There were three, actually. It was very peculiar."

"What was it, a heavy breather?"

"No, it was some guy with a French accent. The third time he called he asked for Guillaume. That's French for William."

"I thought it was French for bean."

"That's *légume,*" she said.

"Ah, so he asked for Guillaume, did he?"

"Yes, but then he gave me the number he had dialed, to check, you know? And usually when people do that, they're off by one digit or they transposed a couple of numbers, or something. But the number he gave me wasn't even close. It didn't make sense at first, but the number seemed familiar. After I hung up, I realized it was your car-phone number." She frowned. "You might have told me you were forwarding your calls here. I could have taken a message or helped the fellow out."

"It's just as well you didn't," Hannigan said. "There was another death threat."

"Oh Bill." She gave him a worried look.

"Don't worry. It's no big deal. Just another crank who wants to shoot off his mouth. The ones who are serious about it don't want to talk about it."

"But your car-phone number isn't listed. How did they get it?"

Hannigan shrugged. "Bribe somebody. Blackmail somebody. Sleep with somebody. Find some ten-year-old whiz-kid computer hacker to break into the data base. There are more ways than you

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could imagine to find out just about anything you want to know."

"So what are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing. Go out for dinner. Have a nice bottle of wine."

"I don't know how you can be so casual about this." She held out her hand. "Look, I'm shaking."

"Glass of wine'll fix you right up. Calm you right down."

"French?"

"Naw. A nice Ontario Riesling."

Gregoire's newest weapon was a cellular phone of his own. It hadn't been his idea. Dumoulin had simply shown up with it soon after the first failed attempt on Hannigan's life. It was very small, and it folded almost in half. Gregoire took it from Dumoulin and slipped it into his pocket.

"*Pour vous.*" Dumoulin said in his ever-expanding French. "I decided to do some research," he continued in English, which Menard translated slowly, "to find out what the hell was going on. He's probably having his calls forwarded."

Gregoire and Menard looked blank.

"It's technology, man," Dumoulin continued. "Hannigan has something programmed into the phone so that when you call his number, the call is intercepted and it rings somewhere else. It doesn't ring in the car. So the bomb won't go off."

Gregoire and Menard still said nothing. "That's why I got the phone." Dumoulin told them. He went on to explain that now someone could watch Hannigan and as soon as he was in the car, the watcher could call Gregoire and Gregoire could try to detonate the bomb wherever he was. Eventually, Hannigan would switch the call forwarding off and they'd have him.

Gregoire took the small phone out and unfolded it and turned it over lovingly in his hands. He appreciated the potential, and also the fact that it was registered in Dumoulin's name and he would get the bills. Here was power. Small and lethal. The ability to communicate instantly with anyone from anywhere. He decided to put it to the test. He would call his mother in Trois Rivières. He hoped he could remember the number.

Susan was puttering in the kitchen when Hannigan woke up. After dinner they'd walked back to her place and Hannigan hadn't gone home. He brushed gently past her and poured a cup of coffee.

"Do you need your car this morning?" Susan asked.

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"No. Why?"

"I have a few errands to run. Mind if I borrow it?"

"Sure. I've got this article that's due in two days and I haven't started writing yet. If I'm here and you're out I can get some work done."

"Not another scathing blast at separatist policies, I hope."

"You know me better than that," he said with a smile.

She took his keys and left.

She liked Hannigan's car. It handled smoothly and offered steady, even acceleration. It had FM and a tape player, while she was restricted to noisy AM stations. She eased back in the plush seat, adjusted the rearview mirror, altered the tilt of the steering wheel slightly, and started the engine smoothly and easily. Then she switched the radio from jazz to classical. Susan enjoyed the phone, too. She liked the convenience of it and the fact that if she broke down on the highway she could get help right away. She also liked the fact that Hannigan had it set up so that you didn't have to pick the phone up to talk. It always horrified her to see people barreling along at great speeds, one hand on the wheel and the other clamping a phone to the side of their head. Before she backed out of the parking spot at the side of her building, she switched on Hannigan's phone and dialed the number of her apartment.

"Yeah?" Hannigan said, with the gruff abruptness he always had when he was disturbed at work.

"It's only me, Tolstoy," she said. "I just wondered if you wanted me to pick anything up for you?"

"Don't think so, thanks. Oh, one thing you can do. Turn off the call forwarding for me, will you, please? I don't want the phone ringing here while I'm trying to work. Calls that I know are for you I can ignore. But if I think they're for me, I'll have to answer and I'll never get this thing done."

"Should I take messages for you?" she asked.

"You can. Or you can just let it ring. Or you can switch it off the system. Whatever. Now let me get back to work."

"I'll leave it on," she said. "You may change your mind. Or I may just call up all my relatives in Australia."

It was warm in the midmorning sunshine and Menard had drunk most of a liter of red wine at breakfast. He sat half-dozing on the bench in the park across the street from Susan Bellamy's apartment building. It wasn't a building, really. Not tall and gleaming like

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Hannigan's. It was a house, renovated into three flats. Menard had no idea who lived here, but Dumoulin had followed Hannigan the night before, and this was where he ended up. He was still in there, according to Dumoulin, wide awake despite being on watch most of the night.

Keeping watch was easy here because there was no underground parking. Hannigan's car stood in plain sight, gleaming in the bright sun, on the paved parking pad at the side of the house. Menard had watched the car steadily for hours and his eyes were beginning to ache. He rubbed them strenuously and yawned. There had been no sign of Hannigan. No activity of any kind. And he was feeling so contented with the wine and the gentle breeze from the lake and the spikes of sunshine through the leaves. He needed to rest his eyes. He'd shut them for just a second.

The dog woke Menard up. It bounced up and down at his feet and yapped angrily. Menard started and opened his eyes wide, looking around wildly, imagining himself surrounded by police with gas masks, riot guns, and dogs. But all he saw was one small mottled mongrel and Menard sent it yelping away with a sharp kick. Then he took a deep breath to stop his heart pounding, rubbed the sleep from his eyes, and resumed his watch. He knew right away that something was different. It just took him a few minutes to figure out what exactly. When he did, it drove the air from his stomach in a gasp. Hannigan's car was gone.

Frantically, he looked up the street, then down, praying he would see it just rounding the corner or waiting at a stop sign. But there were no cars in sight at all.

How long had the car been gone, he wondered desperately? How long had he slept? Had it been a minute or an hour? He looked up at the sun as if he could read the time, but he had no idea which way was east and even if he had, he realized, it would have been useless. He knew all he needed to know. The car was gone. The hare was out. And the hounds had been caught napping.

Gregoire had trained Menard long ago not to run. People notice a running man, he said. Walk quickly and with purpose. For twenty years, that's what Menard had done. But now panic overtook everything he'd learned, and clamping a hand on top of his beret, he ran.

Menard leaned panting against the phone booth as he fished for a quarter, drew the coin from his pocket, and dropped it in the slot. He punched the numbers too quickly in his excitement, hanging

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up, redialing the number of Gregoire's portable phone. *"Vite, vite,"* Menard muttered to himself as he waited for the connection. "Hurry, hurry." He was bouncing up and down in his excitement. He didn't realize at first that the line was busy. Finally the buzzing made itself understood and Menard slammed down the phone. *"Mon hosti de putaine,"* he muttered and lit another Gauloise with anxious fingers.

By eleven o'clock, Hannigan was fed up. The article wasn't going well. He'd written a dozen different openings, none of which was right. He was having trouble focusing and decided he needed a break. And he knew exactly what to do. The kind of shopping excursion Susan was on today followed a predictable pattern. He was willing to bet that he knew exactly where she was at that very minute. He'd surprise her, perhaps be waiting in the car for her, and they'd have lunch together. He'd finish the article in the afternoon.

Shutting off the portable computer, Hannigan stood and stretched, grabbed his keys and his wallet, and went outside to hail a cab. As he settled back on the stiff, cracked upholstery, he looked out and saw a short, fat man in a beret stagger up to a phone booth and lean against it heavily. For a brief second, Hannigan wondered what his hurry was, then he turned his thoughts to Susan and the panting man was forgotten.

Susan drove slowly past the row of parked cars, looking for a space. Usually there were plenty to be had at curbside along this ten-block stretch of shops and restaurants. But today everything was taken. As she searched, Susan realized Hannigan was right and she shouldn't worry about the death threats. But these phone calls were different. They were very direct and very personal and there was something unsettling about them. Whoever had called obviously knew Hannigan's cellular number, but not his unlisted home number. What did they want? Absently, she took her right hand off the wheel, reached out, and tapped her fingers on Hannigan's phone.

Menard tried again. He fumbled the quarter into the slot and hesitated. He could dial Hannigan's number himself. He was sure he remembered it, having watched Gregoire punch out the numbers so many times. Then he could claim that someone else must have called and the resulting explosion, and Hannigan's death, were serendipity. But no. Menard knew himself. He knew that killing someone

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was not in him. He hadn't the stomach for it. The same failing that had kept him from climbing higher up the ranks of the FLQ. He dialed Gregoire.

Susan drove past the store she wanted, turned at the next corner, and began slowly circling back around the long series of blocks.

"'Allo." Gregoire's voice crackled over the phone on the second ring. Menard could hear music and conversation in the background. Gregoire was obviously at that little bistro he liked so well.

"He's out." Menard blurted. "He's gone. He's in the car."

"*Bon.*" Gregoire said, and the phone clicked and hummed in Menard's ear. Thank Christ the responsibility was now out of his hands. He walked away from the phone booth and began looking for a place where he could sit quietly and have a glass of wine. Then he remembered it was Toronto and the bars did not begin serving until 11:30 and he cursed Hannigan at length.

Hannigan rolled down the back window of the cab and the freshness of the autumn air poured in. He loved the climate in Canada. True, the winters in Toronto weren't as dramatic as in Montreal, but the feeling he got from the changing seasons was exhilarating. Let other Canadians head for Florida or California. This was his country and he loved it.

Susan wasn't having any luck at all. There were still no parking spots on her side of the street on her second pass. Once, she saw one on the other side, but it was taken before she could make a U-turn, so she drove along to the next street and continued her slow circling.

Gregoire picked up his change and went outside the bistro. The sun was shining and the cloudless sky was as blue as the fleur-de-lis on the flag of Quebec. It was a perfect day, and it was about to get better. As he strolled along the sidewalk, past convenience stores and dry cleaners and gift shops, he reached into his pocket and took out the piece of paper on which he'd written Hannigan's number. He knew it by heart, but he wanted to make sure. There had been enough mistakes already. He checked the number, put the paper back in his pocket, and standing on the sidewalk as the traffic hummed in his ears, he began to dial slowly. He muttered, "*Maudit*

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pelote, 'annigan," and laughed, causing a woman to walk by him with an uncomfortable look.

Passing in front of the store for a third time, Susan experienced the miracle that sometimes happens to city drivers. Someone was just pulling out of a metered space directly across the street from the front door of the store she was heading to. She pulled up behind the spot, signaled her intention, and waited while the other driver pulled slowly away.

The cab dropped Hannigan off near the shop he knew Susan would be visiting last. He looked up and down the street, on both sides, scanning the people on the street for Susan's familiar face. Not finding it, he turned his attention to the cars parked at the curb and those crawling past them looking hopefully for a place to park. At first, he missed it, obscured by a garbage truck. But then a traffic light changed and the truck chugged ahead, and Hannigan saw the car across the road and down the block. He stepped onto the street and started toward it quickly.

Gregoire knew something hadn't gone right. The pause between dialing and ringing was too long. He hoped that didn't mean that somebody else had already called through and robbed him of the pleasure of killing Hannigan himself. Of course, he'd still take credit, since the bomb was his and he'd taken the risk of planting it, but there'd always be an empty place inside him that knew he hadn't seen the job through. Angrily, he terminated the call and redialed, pushing each number slowly and aggressively.

Hannigan was almost halfway across the street when the explosion came. His eyes had been darting back and forth from his car to the traffic around him to the sidewalk, to see if Susan was anywhere in sight. He had just fixed his gaze back on the car when it erupted in flame and a shower of debris. There was a noise that battered against his ears like the right hands from two heavyweights and a concussion that hammered on his chest like a gong. The next thing he knew, he was sitting on the road surrounded by honking cars and screaming people. His own car, just moments before parked peacefully at the curb, was now a blackened hulk. Its charred body was blown half onto the sidewalk, while the roof lay on top of the crushed hood of a passing Chevrolet. It smoldered and smoked and

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occasional tongues of flame licked skyward. "Oh my God," he screamed aloud, "Susan." He stood and found that something was wrong with his right leg. It nearly collapsed under him. Adjusting for the injury, he limped forward as fast as he could, panic rising with every step.

"Susan," he called out over and over, his voice mingling with the screams and cries of dozens of others in an aria of fear. Then he saw her. She came out of the food store and stood in front of the shattered window. He lurched towards her, still calling her name. She saw him then, too, and dropped her bag of groceries and ran forward. He wrapped his arms around her and squeezed her in relief. He pressed his face into her hair, shut his eyes, and for a brief second wondered what had happened to the man who'd been standing beside the car when it exploded. The man who'd been making a call on his cellular phone

The Final Paragraph

AMOS'S LAST WORDS

"Amos wasn't being cynical. When he said what sounded like 'Justice is Blind,' he was trying to tell us where the photograph was hidden." Killian went to the raised blind in the study and tugged at the cords. The blind opened, and the incriminating photo of the justice's killer, hidden between the slats, floated to the carpet.

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10 stories—including

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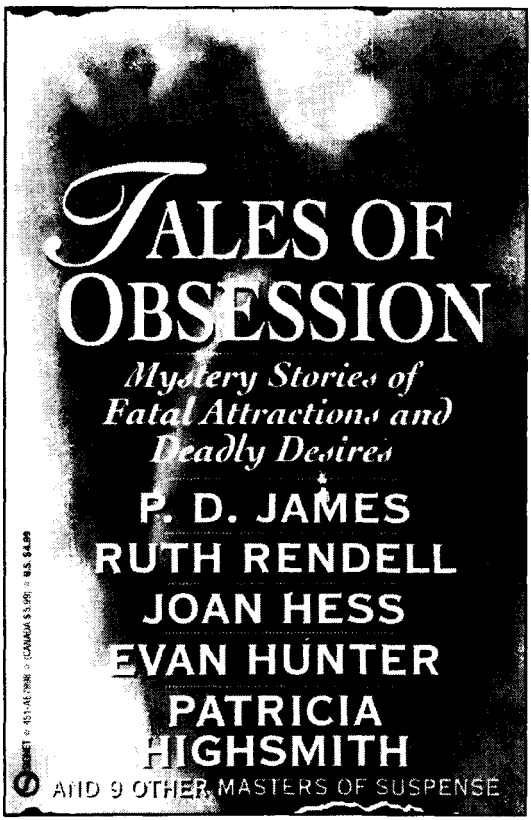

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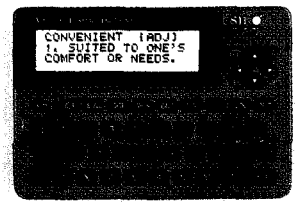

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